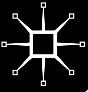

Deliberating War

Patricia Roberts-Miller

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Deliberating War

"*Deliberating War* is a thorough, insightful, and well-written discussion of how people in the Western tradition deliberate about war and treat deliberation as war. In discussing various kinds of war, and various kinds of deliberating about war, Roberts-Miller illuminates how and why some of these are more dangerous than others. This book is a must-read for scholars in history, political science, and communication who care about war, democracy, and the relationships between them."

—Mary E. Stuckey, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences at *Penn State University*

"*Deliberating War* takes rhetoric's relationship to war out of the realm of meaningless metaphor and into the realm of real, critical, potentially cataclysmic importance. For millennia, debates about war have translated to the battlefield and events on the battlefield have translated into debates about who we are, what we value, and how we should act towards one another. Given how high the stakes are, Roberts-Miller demands that readers grapple with how politicians use rhetoric to drag people to war. But politicians don't act alone, so she also demands that everyone learn to choose their words more wisely in matters of war, politics, and life."

—Ryan Skinnell, Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Writing, *San José State University*

"Patricia Roberts-Miller's *Deliberating War* is a probing study of the rhetorical dynamics that feed on political factionalism to displace deliberation and transform the trope of "politics as war" into real war. It is a sustained and close study of multiple cases of armed conflict that cross historical periods and involve an assortment of adversaries. Various rhetorical practices are insightfully analyzed for how they obstruct democratic deliberation, including how the call to arms is strategically framed, which fallacies typically are deployed, which issues are obscured and left unaddressed, and how the dynamics of the discourse can even carry adversaries into a war they wanted to avoid. Her critique of appeasement rhetoric is particularly acute, as is the point she makes about the militarization of politics in general, which reduces the spectrum of normal policy disagreements to political combat. This is an important work of scholarship on the consequences of literalizing the metaphor of war."

—Robert L. Ivie, Professor Emeritus in English (Rhetoric) & American Studies, *Indiana University, Bloomington*

"In this incisive and necessary book, Patricia Roberts-Miller skillfully interrogates the political factors in the decisions made by nations to go to war and the critical lack of deliberation when making those decisions. Her analysis captures the enormity and the tragedy of governments choosing war without losing the humanity of those who must carry out those decisions. In addition to political rhetoric scholars, this book should be required reading within the halls of the U.S. Congress, inside the walls of the Pentagon, and in the classrooms of military academies and war colleges."

—Derek G. Handley, Assistant Professor of English, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (CDR, U.S. Navy Retired)*

"Drawing on a rich collection of examples from ancient Greece to the present day, Patricia Roberts-Miller ably demonstrates the failure of political leaders to engage in deliberation when choosing to undertake, continue, or escalate war. Instead, they reframe the situation, deflect the real issues, demonize the enemy, and make themselves the victim, all to convince themselves that war already has been forced upon them and they have no choice. Sometimes wars are justified, but political leaders, specialists, and citizens will all benefit from this accessible work that shows what can happen when deliberation is an essential feature of the rhetoric of war."

—David Zarefsky, *Northwestern University, Author of Lyndon Johnson, Vietnam, and the Presidency: The Speech of March 31, 1968*

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The maximum use of force is in no way incompatible with the simultaneous use of the intellect. (Carl von Clausewitz, On War *1984, 75)*

Dedicated to Uncle Frank

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Contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Choosing War 31

3 Threatening War 51

4 Factionalizing War 75

5 Delaying War 103

6 Framing War 147

7 Criticizing War 195

8 Conclusion: Militarizing Politics 229

Index 247

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> A conspiracy to circulate among men called and accepted for military service under the Selective Service Act of May 18, 1917, a circular tending to influence them to obstruct the draft, with the intent to effect that result, and followed by the sending of such circulars, is within the power of Congress to punish, and is punishable under the Espionage Act. (*Schenck v. United States* 249 U.S. 1919, 47)

> Where there is a will, there is a ferry. (Hitler et al., *Hitler and His Generals* 2013, 137)

> That day, I likewise obtained of God, that he would use of mee, as a John, to bee an Herald of the Lord's Kingdom now approaching, and the voice crying in the wilderness, for preparation thereunto. (Cotton Mather, *Diary*, April 1692; 1957, 147)

People as different as Mao Tse-Tung, Elon Musk, Steve Bannon, and Huey Newton agree on one thing: politics is war. It's tempting to say that we aren't intended to take the equation literally, that we should understand it as a figure of speech (hyperbole) intended to emphasize the commitment of the speaker. Yet in each of those cases, the rhetor invoked the equation of politics and war in order to justify violating moral norms—about violence (Mao 2020, 54; Newton 1969), dishonesty (Musk 2022), and governance (Bannon, see Strassel 2016). Their equation of politics

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and war was not merely a figure of speech; it was intended to have real-world (that is, literal) consequences. This book takes that equation seriously, and sometimes literally, by pursuing two questions. First, what does framing politics as war do to our ability to deliberate effectively and optimally about our policy options? Second, if politics is war, what kind of war?

One immediate, and perhaps intended, consequence of that equation is that it constrains and sometimes eliminates democratic deliberation. Going to war is a policy option about which a community's deliberation should be the best because, while there are issues where, if things go very badly, someone *might* die, in war, even if things go very well, someone *will* die. It might seem banal in the extreme to say that we should deliberate about war, but there is considerable aversion to deliberating about war while it's going, after it's over, or before it starts, for overlapping reasons. Yet, if we evade or vilify deliberation about war before, during, or after it's started, people will die over issues that could have been solved politically.

I don't rely on any very technical use of the term "war"—this book includes discussions of martial conflicts that never happened (such as the US going to war with France or Spain), martial conflicts in which war was never formally declared (Vietnam, the Falklands/Malvinas), failed attempts to prevent a war (appeasing Hitler, the Falklands/Malvinas), international conflict that never resulted in a direct shooting war between the major adversaries (the Cold War), policy conflicts that were perceived or framed as literally war (the seventeenth-century "free grace" conflict, inter-war anti-communist rhetoric.).[1] It's about times that communities used the term war to describe their situation or their possible options. This isn't a book about military strategy, or military history; it's about rhetoric.

The relation between rhetoric and war is complicated. People don't go to war because of what a situation is, but because of what they are persuaded it is. Since it's possible to talk people into or out of going to war,

[1] The concept of "frames" and "framing" is elegantly explained by Leeper and Slothuus (2018). They note that a media outlet might "frame" a hate group rally in terms of free speech *or* public threat; that framing will influence (but not determine) readers' reaction to the incident. Like a frame on a piece of art, a frame cuts some things off, calls attention to aspects of the art, and reduces attention to others. Public discourse in general might frame an issue in certain ways recurrently, and not because of deliberate or cunning decisions on the part of rhetors. The US, for instance, has the frame of "horse race" for campaigns; that is, media describes the electoral strategies of candidates and frames discussions of policies in light of those strategies (rather than providing information about the policies *qua* policies). For more on the horse race frame, see especially Westwood et al. (2020).

and the stakes of war are so high, it would be useful if we could deliberate about conflicts in such a way that we don't go to war unless it's absolutely necessary, yet we do go to war when it is, and we make reasonable decisions about what kind of war it is and how it could end.

1 Deliberation and Honor[2]

It may seem obvious to say that we should deliberate thoughtfully before declaring war, and yet I have learned that such a claim is surprisingly controversial. I first became aware of aversion to deliberating about war several years ago, in a class about the rhetoric of free speech. I was teaching *Abrams v. United States* (1919) and *Schenck v. United States* (1919) —two famous cases about criminalizing dissent in wartime—and I had a couple of students who were absolutely insistent that, "once boots hit the ground," no criticism of a war should be allowed. I pointed out that refusing to deliberate about a war we were in would mean we were guaranteed that some people in boots would die unnecessarily: some wars would last longer than necessary, corruption or incompetence would go unchecked, and policy would be constrained by cognitive biases (especially "sunk costs"). It seemed to me, I said, that honoring the troops meant working to make sure that they weren't dying for a cause that had a political solution. The students said whether public deliberation about possible errors in the conduct of the war might save lives didn't matter—what mattered was that you could not criticize a war once people were risking their lives for it. To do so would be to dishonor them and their sacrifice.

I thought their stance was incomprehensible, but a few years later I would suddenly find myself much more sympathetic to it.

One of my uncles was a hero to me. He was killed long before I was born; he was a pilot in the Army Air Corps, and killed in the spring 1943 North Africa campaign. He successfully bombed a Nazi supply train, but the explosion disabled his plane, and he fatally crashed. I was told that the

[2] For a clear discussion of "democratic deliberation," see especially André Båchtiger, John S. Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, and Mark E. Warren (2018). It's notable than another term for deliberation is "governance"—the term used by Theodore Windt in his 1986 piece, in which he points out that the dominant "metaphor for campaigning is war; the metaphor for governing is negotiation" and that by that time campaigning had almost become non-stop. The unhappy consequence is that there is no space for deliberation, so that the public discourse about policy issues is entirely in service of campaigning. (Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for recommending the Windt article.)

most likely explanation was that he was flying a plane that is famously difficult to fly (P-39), and we knew from letters that he'd injured an arm recently in the Battle of Kasserine Pass.[3] He'd been awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions during the Kasserine Pass action, so I'd long been curious about that conflict. A few years after that conversation with the students, I looked into the Battle of Kasserine Pass. I wanted to find a noble story.

Instead, what I'd found is that the battle was a notoriously "humiliating" debacle (Hastings 2011, 378), largely blamed on the man in charge—Major-General Lloyd R. Fredendall—who is often described as an incompetent, over-promoted, micro-managing coward. Histories of the battle have little or nothing good to say about Fredendall. He was "an appallingly inept commander" (Carr 2015, 28), whose leadership was "a tangled skein of misunderstanding, duplication of effort, overlapping responsibility, and consequential muddle" (Dear *Oxford Companion* 1995, 644). His communications were often "incomprehensible," and he became angry if asked to clarify (Blumenson 1967, 85). He "was utterly out of touch with his command [...] feuded constantly with his subordinate commanders, and generally broke every known principle of leadership in the employment of his corps" (D'Este *World War* 1990, 24). His "performance was miserable" (D'Este *Eisenhower* 2015, 394). He was "ill-informed and far from the scene" (Rutherford 1971, 121). Stephen Zaloga calls Fredendall's performance "atrocious" (2011, 67). Charles Whiting, author of one of few book-length treatments of the action, summarized the Kasserine Pass debacle:

> Critical of his superiors, Fredendall was outspoken about the defects of his subordinates, ponderous in action, overbearing in attitude and with a tendency to jump to conclusions—probably more often than not, the wrong ones [....] America's first major battle against the Germans in World War Two would end in shame, disgrace and defeat—and Major-General Lloyd R. Fredendall would bear a great deal of the responsibility for that defeat. (Whiting 1984, 113–14)

[3] Throughout the book, I'll mention some of the resources likely to be of most interest to a non-specialist audience. Additional sources are in the References.

While the Kasserine Pass action is covered in most histories of World War II (with probably the most thorough and clear coverage in D'Estes' *Eisenhower* 2015), there are some books on it specifically. Rutherford's *Kasserine: Baptism of Fire* (1971) and Zaloga's *Kasserine Pass 1943* (2011) are short and highly readable. Kelly's *Meeting the Fox* (2002) is among the most recent (and is far more favorable toward Fredendall than most).

Major-General Ernest N. Harmon, tasked by Eisenhower with assessing what went wrong in the battle, reported that Fredendall was "a physical and moral coward" (qtd. Atkinson 2002, 400). One book I read particularly noted his poor handling of the Army Air Corps, putting them in considerable and unnecessary danger (including getting fired on by American troops, Blumenson 1967, 81–2).

I was enraged.

Not at Fredendall, or the military for having someone like him in charge, but at the authors who called the battle a blunder, or who criticized Fredendall. I didn't think they were wrong; I just thought they shouldn't have said it.

I was immediately puzzled by my own rage. It would make sense for me to be outraged that Fredendall might have been an over-promoted coward whose incompetence may have caused my uncle's death. It would make sense for me to be outraged if I believed that the authors were inaccurate or unfair to Fredendall. But, to be honest, I didn't doubt that they were right. I was outraged because someone was suggesting that the battle was bungled. And I felt strongly that that was not something that should be said. It took me a while to understand why I was more angry at someone arguing (even correctly) that my uncle's death might have been the consequence of a leader's incompetence than I was at the incompetent who might have caused his death. Suddenly I understood my students' reaction.

My almost visceral response was that criticizing how the action was conducted dishonored my uncle because it seemed to say that his death was unnecessary, and therefore meaningless. What I learned from my rage about the criticism of the Kasserine Pass action is that it is tremendously difficult to consider seriously that someone we love and admire might have died unnecessarily—the consequence of a bad leader, action, technology, or war.

Eventually, of course, I worked around to realizing that some people are incompetent, some decisions are unforced errors, some wars are the consequence of irresponsible war-mongering media, rhetoric and policies grounded in short-term benefit for political figures, a culture of demagoguery, fanatical authoritarians, and various other neither reasonable nor honorable reasons and factors. Even in a just war (and I do think American intervention in WWII was just) there are unjust actions, bad decisions, incompetence, and failures of leadership. If we are to make the conduct of war more just and competent, we have to acknowledge the errors. We can't learn from our mistakes if we don't acknowledge they were mistakes. That a war is right doesn't mean that every action taken in it is either right or reasonable. And, if we're unwilling to admit that, then more people die.

As has often been pointed out, the Bush Administration worked hard to prevent deliberation about any aspect of the proposed Iraq invasion in 2003 (Bacevich 2013; Bostdorff "George W. Bush" 2003; Ivie 2007; Krebs and Lobasz 2009; Murphy 2003). Advocates of war who criticized that invasion, or specific aspects of the Bush Administration plan, or who called for deliberation, were characterized as anti-war, on the side of terrorists, pathologically motivated, unpatriotic (Roberts-Miller *Rhetoric and Demagoguery* 2019, 33–53). For instance, when former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki testified as to the number of troops that would be required for occupying Iraq after a successful invasion (a number consistent with expert opinion), his argument was publicly dismissed by both Vice President Cheney and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz (Moten 2008, 511; Diamond 2007, 283–85). Shinseki wasn't anti-war; he wasn't even opposed to the invasion of Iraq; he disputed the feasibility aspect of the fourth phase of the Bush Administration plan (the occupation). Accused of "wildly" overestimating the number of troops necessary, he was, if anything, underestimating the number (Enterline et al. 2009). The Bush Administration stance was that trying to deliberate about the war undermined support for it, and the Administration saw as its task the "selling" of the war (Roberts-Miller 2019).

We have to live in a world in which we honor the military dead without thinking we are prohibited from being critical of the cause for which they fought, the people who led them, or the political discourse that caused them to go to war. Learning from mistakes gives those mistakes, and the deaths those mistakes caused, meaning. My uncle was a hero. Fredendall bungled the Battle of the Kasserine Pass, in ways that might have contributed to my uncle's death. Both of those things can be true at the same time.

As will be discussed throughout the book, it's common for rhetors to try to curtail or prohibit deliberating about war before one has started because they think deliberation might cause us to delay in an urgent situation, weaken our will, enable cowardice to sneak in the door. When we're seriously considering war, it's easier to persuade people to imagine our complicated situation in binaries—pro-/anti-war, patriotic/traitorous, brave/cowardly, action/talk, confident/defeatist. Believing we are in danger of being attacked (or are already being attacked) increases in-group loyalty, and so we are less open to hearing nuanced explanations of our situation, holding in- and out-groups to the same standards, realizing that the world does not consist of an in-group and an out-group, or even

paying attention to non in-group sources of information.[4] If we imagine there are only two positions (pro- or anti-war), then we are likely to hear any criticism of our war plan—or even calls for deliberation—as “anti-war.” Thus, in the process of talking ourselves into a war, we can talk ourselves out of deliberating about that war, and out of deliberation at all. If we can’t deliberate about war during, after, or before, then we can’t deliberate about war at all. And then we have more war, less deliberately.

2 Hitler and His Generals

Adolf Hitler is sometimes presented as a military genius, and sometimes as a rank amateur who got in the way of his generals. The former narrative ignores the failures of the German military, and the second holds him purely responsible, and both narratives are wrong. What matters about Hitler’s discussions with his generals, and the reason I want to mention a few of them in this introduction, is that they exemplify some of the ways that, even in the midst of making life or death decisions, interlocutors privilege methods, goals, frames, and assumptions that constrain deliberation. Ernest May argues that

> At any time or place, executive judgment involves answering three sets of questions: “What is going on?”; “So what?” (or “What difference does it make?”); and “What is to be done?” The better the process of executive judgment, the more it involves asking these questions again and again, not in set order, and testing the results until one finds a satisfactory answer to the third question—what to do (which may be, of course, to do nothing). (2001, 452)[5]

May argues that Hitler had better ways of asking those questions than did the French or British leaders (at least until 1940) in that he let generals know of his plans and then let them tell him how and why he was

[4] The “in-group” is not necessarily the group in power. It’s a term meaning “Us” (the group we are in). Thus, in the anti-communist demagoguery of Elizabeth Dilling (discussed in the Chap. 6), communists are out-group, and capitalists are in-group, but for the pro-communist demagoguery of the Weathermen, communists are in-group, and capitalists are out-group.

[5] Teachers of policy argumentation will recognize the “stock issues” (or stases): what is the problem? Is it serious? Will it go away on its own? And then about various policy options: what is the plan? Is it feasible? Will it solve the problem we’ve identified? Are there likely to be unintended consequences worse than the problem we’re trying to solve?

wrong—he tested his ideas. The paradox is that Nazi success in the spring of 1940 didn't persuade Hitler that his process (i.e., letting generals disagree, taking their objections into consideration) was a good one. Instead, "After the 'miracle' in France, Hitler became so sure of his own genius that he ceased to test his judgment against those of others, and his generals virtually ceased to challenge him" (May 2001, 460). His method of decision-making became much worse.

In mid-December of 1942, Hitler and his generals were facing a complicated situation of their own making. The first eighteen months of the invasion of the Soviet Union had gone almost too well, with Nazi troops advancing so far in some places that they created a salient.[6] Salients, as the Nazis knew well, give the enemy an opportunity to encircle large numbers of troops—a strategy the Nazis had used to good effect in its invasion. The most famous of the Nazi salients was Stalingrad, where Friedrich Paulus had been ordered to advance as far into the city as possible. By mid-fall, various troops (including the Sixth Army, Fourth Panzer Army, and Third Rumanian Army) had advanced far enough that they were threatened with being encircled by Soviet troops. Richard Evans says:

> Senior generals, including Paulus and his superior Weichs, and Halder's successor Zeitzler, all advised Hitler to order a withdrawal […]. But for Hitler the symbolic importance of Stalingrad now far outweighed any practical considerations. (*Third Reich at War* 2008, 410)

Hitler refused to order a retreat, and "the enormously overstretched Axis lines" were encircled by Soviet forces November 22, 1942 (Stargardt 2015, 325).[7] Hitler, famously opposed to retreats of any kind, refused to order a "breakout" (essentially a fighting retreat), at least partially motivated by having "publicly staked his personal prestige" on capturing

[6] A salient, also sometimes called a pocket, is a bulge in a line of troops, large enough that the troops are in danger of being encircled and cut off from supplies.

[7] The Battle of Stalingrad is covered in any military history of WWII. Because post-1989 access to Soviet records significantly changed much of our understanding of the situation, books written since then tend to be the most useful. Jonathan House and David Glantz's trilogy (2009a, b, 2014) might be more detail than interests most people, but it's thorough and engaging. Their one-volume *Stalingrad* (2019) is highly regarded and benefits from access to Soviet records. Antony Beevor's *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* (1999) is a deservedly prize-winning book. Citino's *Death of the Wehrmacht* (2007) has a long footnote with a thorough and useful survey of scholarship on Stalingrad (367 n. 91). One of the more cogent discussions is Richard Evans' *The Third Reich at War* (2008, 409–420).

Stalingrad (Ziemke and Bauer 1987, 473); see also Ullrich *Downfall* 2020, 330–32). Whether a break-out would have worked is questionable, but the majority of his generals were in favor of that strategy (House and Glantz *Endgame* (2014, 4–6); Citino 2007, 299). Hitler favored a plan to have the encircled troops stay put while Erich von Manstein broke the encirclement from outside to provide relief (a "relief offensive"). Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe would airlift the necessary supplies, a hopeful (if not unrealistically wishful) solution, since its comparisons to other similar relief efforts implied it would require 750 tons daily (Stargardt 2015, 326); Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, promised they could deliver 300 tons daily. In fact, the height was 120 tons daily (for a few weeks); more common was 90 (Evans *Third Reich at War* 2008, 413).

Robert Citino says, "At the time, there wasn't an air force in the world with the transport capacity to ship enough food to feed a quarter-million mouths per day, let alone the ammunition and replacement parts to allow a modern army to fight a sustained, 360 degree battle against encircling forces" (2007, 299). So, the question is: why weren't the unreasonable promises of the Luftwaffe deliberated more critically and reasonably? David Glantz and Jonathan House's summary of the decision-making process is useful:

> Göring, trapped by his previous promises to Hitler, insisted that the *Luftwaffe* could deliver the tonnage. Hitler too was trapped: he had long argued that the *Luftwaffe*, the new high-technology air force of the Reich, was much motivated and effective than the uncooperative German army. To reject Göring's assurances would be to be repudiate both the *Luftwaffe* and its chief in favor of the army generals who had so often thwarted the Führer's will. (*Endgame* 2014, 6)

Winning an argument with his generals was more important than making the most reasonable possible decision. And here it's relevant to explain why Hitler had his meetings with his generals transcribed. According to Helmut Heiber and David Glantz, the recent editors of the transcripts, in 1942, Hitler ordered that his meetings with his generals be transcribed because he was angry that Wilhelm List had failed to capture the oil fields of the Caucasus in the summer of 1942. Hitler's explanation of that failure was that List had not followed Hitler's orders (Heiber and Glantz 2013, xii). According to Heiber, Hitler wanted meetings transcribed so that he could have a written record "assigning responsibility for everything the German side did or did not do militarily during the war" (xv; see also

xi–xii, 2013, 759). That is, these meetings were transcribed because Hitler was in a zero-sum contest of "rightness" with his own generals.

If we ask the wrong question, it's hard to get the right answer. Policy deliberation should be about questions like: what should we do now? What are our options? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of those options? But, for Hitler, the ever-present (and perhaps even dominant) question was: which one of us is better? Pursuing that question means that, rather than try to explore a variety of options reasonably, interlocutors focus on saving face, deflecting responsibility from themselves (or their in-group), scapegoating, and demonstrating in-group loyalty.

A striking example of such constrained deliberation is Hitler's meeting on December 12, 1942, with Chief of Staff of the OKH (*Oberkommanda des Heeres*) Kurt Zeitzler. By this time, it was clear that this plan of breaking the encirclement from outside was not going well—the encirclement was not broken, the Luftwaffe was not delivering adequate supplies, and even Manstein (the only person to have supported Hitler's policy of a "relief offensive") was pressing for a breakout (Kershaw *Hubris* 1999, 545).

Zeitzler reported that there had been "14 cases within six days" of "deaths caused by exhaustion" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 19). Zeitzler seemed to be gently putting pressure on Hitler to rethink his current approach. Hitler began to consider the information Zeitzler gave him, but, as was often the case, he was averse to the materiel losses—"I'm only worried that if we draw back now, all the materiel will be lost. Then we won't have anything" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 19). After a very brief exchange about pragmatics, Hitler drifted into a pontificating digression about the relative racial purity of various troops, before concluding, "Whether or not they are all militarily useful is a different question, which I can't assess" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 20). If race isn't relevant for assessing their military utility, then it isn't relevant to the question of whether he should stick with his current plan, so why did he bring it up?

After a series of discussions of military situations that ranged from bad to worse for Nazis, the discussion came back to the Stalingrad situation. Presented with specific information, and pressed to make a decision, Hitler again drifted off into a digression: the relative importance of "condition" and "fighting value" for assessing troops, landing on the conclusion that fighting value matters more. One of the generals present (Schmundt) apparently said, "Last time it was the condition" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 27). Albeit slightly more relevant than the issue of race, pondering

the relative importance of condition versus fighting value was not a useful question for determining what to do in that specific situation. It did, however, momentarily deflect from a decision Hitler didn't want to make.

In the same meeting Zeitzler brought up a situation similar to the Stalingrad encirclement, but closer to Moscow, a place called Velikiye Luki.[8] About 7000 Nazi troops had been encircled there on November 24–27, and Hitler had, true to form, refused to order a break-out. Since troops and planes were being rushed to Stalingrad, there was even less that could be done to supply the encircled the troops at Velikiye Luki. Zeitzler reported:

> [T]he troops are very exhausted [....] Now they have to sit on this narrow front day and night, and they're on the alert all night and have to get out. An example: the men don't even take off their pants anymore; they just leave them on. (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 37)

For no clear reason, Hitler brought up Sukhinichi, a digression Zeitzler ignored.[9] Instead of responding to Htiler's comment, Zeitzler pointed to the map and said, "They've reinforced the push in order to come in here." Hitler responded to this move of trying to get him back on track by saying,

> I have to say one thing in all these cases. I get too few suggestions from the Army for the Knight's Cross, and I get too few documents for the Oak Leaves—not only for generals, but also for officer, sergeants and whole units who distinguish themselves. That's also the case at the Luftwaffe; they get the Oak Leaves no, too. There's no relation there anymore today. (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 37)

[8] There is very little in English specifically about that battle, with Robert Forczyk's recent *Velikiye Luki* (2020) being a thorough and readable exception. It is also discussed in Ziemke and Bauer (1987) and (in the context of the larger Rzhev Salient) in Buttar (2022).

[9] Heiber and Glantz, the editors of the transcripts, do not explain what the reference to Sukhnichi means, and it remains unclear to me. My best guess is that it has to do with disagreements with Field Marshall von Kluge about what should have been done in Sukhinichi in January and February of 1942. Four thousand German troops were trapped in a "pocket" at Sukhinichi on January 3. The commander requested permission to break out, a policy von Kluge supported. Hitler refused (Ziemke and Bauer 1987, 122–23, 164–82; see also Buttar 2022, 94). Famously, Hitler believed that his refusing to listen to his generals' advice for retreats in the winter of 1941–1942 was proof of his better judgment, so this reference to Sukhinichi may have seemed to him an example of one of the times he was right and they were wrong. Since Zeitzler ignored the comment, it was apparently irrelevant.

The implication seems to be that Hitler saw the problem as morale (rather than any decisions he had made). Zeitzler also ignored that digression and went back to specific points about the troops and situation, still pushing for a decision. In late January and early February of 1943, ignoring Hitler's orders, some of the encircled Axis troops broke out, and some surrendered. Robert Forczyk says the "campaign was regarded as an unmitigated disaster" (2020, 88).

Two weeks later, also against Hitler's orders, the encircled Stalingrad troops surrendered. The exact number of troops who surrendered is disputed, but as David Glantz and Jonathan House say, "The question of combat losses and prisoners of war is moot if one considers that virtually all 217,000 Axis forces in Sixth Army on 9 January, less the 30,000 flown out, were ultimately killed or captured" (*Endgame* 2014, 582). The loss of material—about which Hitler had been so concerned—was made worse by the attempt to keep the troops supplied.

In May of 1943, Hitler was discussing the problem of holding Sicily and difficulty transporting troops between Sicily and the rest of Italy, given that ferries had been destroyed. Hitler told his generals, "Where there is a will there is a ferry" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 137). In the same meeting, he compared the problem of the relative durability of Italian and Nazi tanks, concluding that the continual breaking down of Italian tanks was "a problem of the will" (Heiber and Glantz 2013, 138). There isn't, and it wasn't. The will cannot create a ferry, and flaws in Italian tanks were the consequence of many factors (including pre-war degrees of industrialization). Similarly, medals are neither warming nor nutritious, and an admittedly irrelevant digression on the relative fighting value of race isn't relevant or helpful.

By the autumn of 1942, the situation was ugly for Nazis. The Nazi war machine "sat now, motionless and relatively harmless, on three separate and far-flung fronts: El Alamein, Stalingrad, and the Caucasus" (Citino, *Death* 2007, 267). After the war, in self-serving and sometimes actively dishonest memoirs, many of Hitler's generals tried to claim that they fought Hitler over his bad decisions, that they were right all along, and Germany could have won had Hitler listened to them (see, for instance, Erich von Manstein's disingenuous discussion of the errors regarding Stalingrad, 1982, 289–294). Richard Evans describes the "long-lived legend" that was: Post-war, "repeated by many of Hitler's surviving generals after the war according to which if only they had been left by Hitler to get on with it, they could have achieved victory" (Evans *Third Reich at War* 2008, 211–12; see also Citino *Death* 2007, 34, 43, 87). As Evans says,

> The truth, however, was very different. The generals' blind insistence on attack through the autumn and early winter of 1941, their failure to prepare defensive positions for overwintering, their naïve optimism in the face of what they knew to be a determined and well-equipped enemy, their studious refusal to draw the consequences from the increasing tiredness of their troops, the growing difficulties of supply and the failure of much of their equipment in the bitter cold of the Russian winter brought them to a situation by December where they were paralysed by despair and indecision. (*Third Reich at War* 2008, 112; see also Citino *Death* 2007, 254–58)

What one can see in the transcripts is the extent to which deliberation was constrained by a combination of behaviors: Hitler's resorting to deflection and digression, his interlocutors' tendency to defer to him (the authoritarian decision-making structure), but also that (for whatever reason) they shared his optimism and his faith in the will. They were just as committed as he was to believing in the offensive, the short sharp action, the superiority of their race, faith in the will, and Hitler's genius.[10] Everyone involved chose to constrain deliberation. While they disagreed about specific strategies, on the whole Hitler's generals agreed with him about Operation Blau (of which the attack on Stalingrad was part). Yet, "From its beginning in late June 1942, Operation Blau was almost certainly beyond the military and logistical capabilities of the German armed forces," largely because, while unsuccessful, the Soviet forces had done considerable damage to German troops and material. House and Glantz say, "Blinded by ideology and confidence in the superiority of German arms, Hitler *and his advisers* saw but largely ignored this attrition" (*Endgame* 2014, 585, emphasis added).

Given that humans are human, it isn't reasonable to set the standards for policy deliberation so high that only entirely disinterested angels can meet them. We are biased, we have commitments, and we genuinely disagree with other people. We are passionate about our political commitments because we should be passionate about our political commitments. Some versions of decision-making assume that it's both desirable and possible for people to deliberate without either bias or affective attachment; it is neither. The assumption that it's possible to be unemotional and

[10] Probably no one was more committed to the myth of Hitler's genius than Hitler himself. But, after the unimaginable success of the invasion of France, a course of action opposed or doubted by many of his generals, many of the military leadership were smitten (see especially "The Blitzkrieg Triumph" in Kershaw, *Hitler Myth* (1987)).

unbiased is a relatively recent one, and deeply troubled by research on cognition. That we are probably incapable of unemotional and unbiased argumentation regarding policy decisions doesn't mean, however, that it's all hopeless and we're all impossibly entangled in self-justification and power politics. While no argument is perfect, some are better than others, and good enough is, well, good enough. And that's the goal of this book—to advocate "good enough" deliberation largely through examples of frames and practices that constrain and obscure even that relatively low standard of argumentation.

3 The Voice Crying in the Wilderness

In a sense, this book began with something that puzzled me when I was writing my dissertation: why so many people claim to be a "voice crying in the wilderness" when they are advocating a fairly or even very popular policy or ideology, and they are doing so from a position of relative power. They certainly aren't an unheard voice martyred for resisting power. John Muir, who invoked the metaphor in his attempt to preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park (1908), was far from isolated in his position. In fact, he had the support of the majority of the Sierra Club. He was ultimately unsuccessful (which I think tremendously unfortunate, as I think he was right), but he wasn't alone or unheard.[11] Being in the minority, or on the losing side of a policy conflict, is not the same as being a solitary and persecuted voice. His opponents were, I think, wrong, but they weren't persecuting him by disagreeing, and he was not alone. I discovered that this posture—of a lone voice (or besieged minority) persecuted for being committed to the truth—is surprisingly popular in American public discourse. Unfortunately, it's often connected to characterizing the policy disagreement as war, and thereby justifying violence against anyone who disagrees. It is often part of militarizing politics.

For instance, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England Puritan authorities often described themselves as persecuted by the likes of Mary Dyer (a Quaker), Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, John Wheelwright, and people falsely accused and unjustly convicted of witchcraft—that is, people whom they prosecuted and persecuted. None of those people who were hung or banished presented a military or physical

[11] Frederick Turner's *Rediscovering America* (1985) describes the whole unfortunate incident in some detail; it's also an engaging biography of Muir.

threat (Quakers, after all, are pacifist). These people were prosecuted and persecuted for what they said (or, in the case of the witchcraft trials, what someone said about them). Dyer was hung for "traducing the ministers" (contradicting or criticizing them), Hutchinson was banished on the same grounds. Williams was accused of advocating "new and dangerous opinions against the authority of the magistrates," and Wheelwright was banished for sedition (what we would call "treason"—fomenting a violent rebellion against the authorities). What they (and others) had done was verbally disagree with the authorities about some fairly complicated questions of Protestant theology. Yet, this verbal disagreement was treated as proof that those groups were part of a Satanic/Jesuitical war on the Puritans, "participants in Satan's ages-long plot to destroy Christianity" (Winship *Times and Trials* 2005, 55).

The controversy between the authorities and people like Wheelwright and Hutchinson is often mis-named the "Antinomian Controversy," but it's more accurately described as the "free grace controversy" (Winship 2002).[12] In the abstract, it concerned the precise relationship among faith, grace, works, justification, and sanctification—a dispute so abstruse that even scholars of the controversy have difficulty agreeing as to what, exactly, were the specific issues at stake. The extent to which an individual can will salvation has always been a contentious issue in Christian theology, and remains so. Thus, it's not a surprise that there would have been disagreement in Massachusetts. What was off the table for that community, however, were the various ways that Christians manage the vexed topic now—evading the question entirely, declaring it a mystery, having different sects for the different positions. A major premise of the Puritan faith was that Scripture is clear to people of intelligence and faith. If Scripture is clear to the saved, then disagreement about an important issue in a community means that some interlocutor is advocating literally damning doctrine. Since the Puritans were committed to having a community grounded in Scriptural practice, there could be very little legitimate disagreement about public policies. I'll note that this commitment to a politics of certainty is not restricted to Puritans, or people who ground politics in their religious faith—unhappily, there are many people who believe that every

[12] The David Hall collection of documents on the "Antinomian Controversy" is deservedly famous, although Winship's more recent work (2002, 2005) is persuasive that the term "antinomian" was a smear—no one involved was advocating antinomianism (that is, ignoring the law), although the term was regularly flung at opponents.