



Volume 7. Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

Decree from the Chief of the Security Police to the Heads of all State Police Offices
(September 3, 1939)

The outbreak of war in September 1939 gave Himmler and Heydrich unprecedented opportunities to deploy and expand their apparatus of terror. By that time, the SS consisted of four main divisions: the general SS, the security service for internal surveillance, the SS Special Purpose Troops [*Verfügungstruppen*], and the Death's Head Units [*Totenkopfverbände*], which oversaw the growing network of concentration camps. Additionally, Himmler and Heydrich also commanded all other police institutions, most notably the political police [*Geheime Staatspolizei* or Gestapo] and the criminal police, which allowed them to spy on and control the home front under the pretense of exceptional wartime circumstances. On September 3, 1939, Heydrich, head of the Security Police and the Security Service, announced the following measures for preserving internal security during the war.

[Secret!]

[Re: Basic Principles for Maintaining Internal Security during the War]

In order to secure the commitment of all the resources of the nation against any disturbance and sedition, which is essential for the realization of the Führer's aims, the following principles are laid down for the security organs of the Reich to ensure the internal security of the state.

1. Any attempt to undermine the unity of the German people and its determination to fight must be ruthlessly suppressed. In particular, any person who doubts the victory of the German nation or questions the justification of the war is to be arrested.
2. Those compatriots, however, who are guilty of mistakes of some kind through personal distress or in moments of weakness, must be treated with psychological understanding and efforts must be made to strengthen their will by educative means.
3. Particular attention must be paid to all attempts to influence other people in public in a hostile direction towards nation and Reich—in bars, on public transport, etc. In the same way, drastic measures must be taken against any attempt to form groups and rings with the aim of spreading such views and information. If instances occur of public activity or the formation of rings, the suspected persons must in every case be arrested.

4. After the arrest of the suspected person all inquiries necessary to clear up the case must be made without delay. In the course of this it must be established as thoroughly as possible through files available at the State Police offices and at subsections of the SD and by interviewing witnesses, and through enquiring at local Party offices, what general attitude and what particular motives were behind the actions of the persons concerned. The Chief of the Security Police must then be informed without delay and a decision requested on the further treatment of the arrested persons, since the ruthless liquidation of such elements may be ordered at a high level.

5. Compatriots who are guilty of lapses not willfully but for excusable reasons must, after thorough interrogation on the point, be taken to the head of the State Police office in person, who shall lecture them and admonish them thoroughly. This lecture and warning must be carried out in such a way as to produce loyalty and to strengthen their will. While they must be left in no doubt that they are to expect tougher measures in the event of a repetition, the result of this warning should not be mere intimidation; it should rather have the effect of convincing and encouraging the person concerned. The attention of the relevant Party offices must then be drawn to the compatriot concerned and they must be requested to provide political supervision and supervision in material matters.

6. Appropriate steps should be taken at once against informers who for personal reasons make unjustified and exaggerated reports about compatriots, in the form of a serious warning and, in cases of malice, of transfer to a concentration camp.

7. The chiefs of the State Police offices are personally responsible for the effective suppression of any sign of defeatism in their area.

[Signed Heydrich]

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes, ed., *Nazism, 1919-1945, Vol. 4: The German Home Front in World War II*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 137-138.

Source of original German text: Erlass des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei an die Leiter aller Staatspolizei(leit)stellen (3. September 1939), Bundesarchiv Koblenz. R58, Vol. 243, AZ PP II-No. 223/39g; also reprinted in T. W. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft*, No. 180, Cologne, 1974, pp. 1061-62.