Introduction

- The Holocaust left society with a lasting legacy. Questions have emerged regarding Allied motives and intentions during the war; specifically, whether England and America could and should have bombed Auschwitz in order to save those destined for the crematoriums.
- In 1978, David Wyman published “Why Auschwitz was Never Bombed” and argued that Allied indifference, politics, and anti-Semitism helped perpetrate the destruction of Europe’s Jews, triggering an onslaught of research examining the issue.
- Analysis of the historiography allows society to navigate a subject fraught with emotional turmoil and map the debate of whether or not the Allies could have bombed Auschwitz and if so, whether or not they should have.

Military Capabilities

- Richard Breitman: British intelligence began to pick up reports of deportations and killings as early as 1942, but it would have been a small piece of the puzzle. Breitman believes there was only one logical conclusion to the early reports, but without a historical precedent for the industrialization of death, extermination would have seemed incomprehensible.
- Richard Levy: After the 1941 Wannsee Conference, Nazis gave high priority to the Final Solution and improvised shoot and burn pits when transports exceeded crematoria capacity. This method was impervious to bombing and could process as many persons per day as the gas chambers.
- Stuart Erdheim: Precision bombing didn’t exist. A bombing raid on a military complex near Buchenwald killed circa 384 prisoners.
- Tami Davis Biddle: The Allies circulated the idea of ‘precision bombing’ to alleviate societal concerns surrounding civilian deaths. In reality, the USAF engaged in “pattern bombing” and wasn’t capable of the precision of present-day strikes. In a 1943 raid against Stuttgart, not one of the 338 B-17s reached its intended target.
- James Kitchens: The Alps, Carpathians, wind, and weather created geographical limitations to B-24 bombing missions out of Foggia. Vis Island was too small to stage a large scale bombing operation. B-17s and B-24s cruised at high altitudes between 15,000-30,000 feet and didn’t have the precision needed to bomb specific buildings. Mosquitos could carry the required heavy bomb load, but only for surprise, short-distance attacks and lacked the bomber range. Reports received through the underground or from escaped prisoners lacked data necessary for a bombing mission and contained substantial inaccuracies. Any bombing missions would require further photo reconnaissance and analysis.

Ethics

- Henry L. Feingold: Allies viewed the destruction of the Jews as just one of many atrocities committed by the Nazis. We give the subject a historical weight not felt at the time. The Allies wanted to gain a decisive victory and liberate all people suffering under the Nazi regime.
- Gerhard Riegner: The Allies were morally insensitive, indifferent, and anti-Semitic. They needed greater determination and their bureaucracy played a role in the destruction process.
- Herbert Druks: Concerns over inmate deaths split the opinion of Jewish leaders. They were unable to present united consent to the Allies for the bombing of Auschwitz.
- Tami Davis Biddle: Leaders who worked 15+ hours per day, 7 days a week for the strategy made decisions amidst competing wartime priorities, partial information, and confusion. Resources couldn’t be diverted from the 1944 D-Day invasion.
- James Kitchens: Legal ramifications of the Hague Convention of 1907, which prohibited the bombing of POW camps and other undefended structures, had to be considered.
- Richard Levy: Chronological analysis shows bombing requests spurred by the 1944 Hungarian deportations were too late to affect the outcome and priority was given to D-Day.
- Gerhard Weinberg: Historians need to avoid shifting culpability away from the perpetrators. There will always be more that could have been done, but the shadow of doubt will always remain.
- Deborah Lipstadt: People who stand by and take no action become facilitators. Virtually every Allied organization should have done more and can be criticized for inaction.
- Sir Martin Gilbert: Bombing could be a moral boost and retribution, but the Allies lacked maps, critical intel, and bomber capability to launch a successful bombing mission.

Conclusion

- The quadrant shows where historians fall within the debate of whether or not the Allies could have bombed Auschwitz and whether or not they should have.
- Gilbert notably posits that even though the Allies should have, they lacked the military capability. Others believe they had the ability, but shouldn’t divert resources away from a strategy that would ultimately win the war and liberate all victims.
- More extreme views hold the Allies complicit in the Holocaust; however, Weinberg cautions that guilt lies only with the perpetrators.
- There will always be more that could or should have been done, but the vast majority of Allied decisions have stood the test of time.
- By judging past decisions, we’ve acknowledged we would proceed differently. Research should be used to prevent massacres or change future responses to genocide by the international community.

Alternatives

Alternate scenarios with a higher probability of success:
- Retributive or retaliatory bombing
- Allied propaganda campaign against extermination
- Reversal of anti-immigration legislation
- Bombing as a morale boost

Sources