

"The Diplomacy of Self-Delusion: Poland's Relations with Germany,  
1932-1939."

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May, 1968

[Honors thesis]

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Preface	page i
I 1932 - 1935	1
II May 12, 1935 - October 1, 1938	34
III October 1, 1938 - September 1, 1939	73
Select Bibliography	

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Professor Waclaw Jędrzejewicz of the Josef Pilsudski Institute in New York City and Professor J. D. Futch of Washington and Lee University for their kind assistance. Of course, all errors and omissions are attributable to the author alone. Thanks are due also to the staff of the McCormick Library of Washington and Lee University and Mrs. John Hughes, my typist.

I have titled each section with an appropriate adage taken from Unkempt Thoughts by the Polish aphorist Stanislaw Lec, translated from the Polish by Jacek Galazka.

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FOREWORD

"Can we rework the calendar so that we don't have  
to live in the twentieth century?"

In 1966, Poland celebrated the millenium of a history which has unfolded in a panorama of great figures, glamorous events, and persistent tragedy. At times, those were happy years--when kings of the caliber of Casimir the Great, Stephen Batory and Sigismund I ruled a thriving land. And at times the past was glorious also: Jan Sobieski's rescuing Europe from the Turks at Vienna. A rich culture and the tradition of great universities produced the astronomer Copernicus, the poet Mickiewicz, and the pianists Chopin and Paderewski. In the eighteenth century continuous attacks and partitions inspired a lively spirit of insurrection which manifested itself in the exploits of Poles like Kosciuscko and Pulaski in America and elsewhere. Yet the great figures and glamorous events are merely brilliant flashes against a somber background of blood, suffering, and repression. And Polish history remains a record of futile struggle against the vagaries of geography and grasping neighbors.

With the coming of the first World War, Poland was still divided amongst Habsburg, Hohenzollern, and Romanov. An interesting though incompatible blend of Allied idealism, fear, and revenge, aided throughout by Wilsonian midwifery, led to the birth of Poland as an independent state after the War. Adam Mickiewicz had prayed for a major conflagration so that Poland might be restored.<sup>1</sup> Yet if Poland's restoration depended on the success of the Allies in a

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1. R. L. Buell, Poland: Key to Europe (New York: 1939) p. 65.

great war, her continued existence depended on the energetic maintenance of the Versailles treaty. Poland was not, in the twenty-year period of her independence, master of her own fate.

The Versailles settlement had granted Poland independence as well as temporary military supremacy over Germany and Russia. But Versailles did not resolve the problems which, historically, have proved inimical to Poland's existence. In 1919, Poland still lacked any striking geographical boundaries, still possessed a confused history of frontiers, and still presented a divisive intermingling of nationalities and languages. Trapped between Germany and Russia, Poland depended upon the weakness of the two more populous goliaths or their reciprocal hostility to guarantee her security as a state. The first condition obtained in the 1920's, the second in the early and mid-1930's. The task of Polish diplomacy centered on counterbalancing the threat from Russia and Germany and on stabilizing Poland's position in the inherently unstable framework of German-Polish-Soviet relations.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to carry out this policy did not ultimately prevent the fourth partition of Poland, for the policy resembled "a canary who has persistently but unsuccessfully endeavored to swallow two cats."<sup>3</sup>

The reborn Polish state had encountered from the outset the determined hostility of its western neighbor. Stung by the humili-

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2. H. L. Roberts, "The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck," in The Diplomats 1919-1939, (Princeton: 1953) Craig and Gilbert, ed. p. 583.
  3. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, Prologue to Tragedy (New York: 1964) p. 282.

ation of the Versailles Treaty, Germany saw in the independence of Poland a vexing reminder of that humiliation. Most Germans considered it probable that the work of the Versailles system would be undone and that the Polish corridor, Upper Silesia, and the greater part of Posnania would be restored to the Reich.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Germany waged a lengthy economic war with Poland, flooded the League of Nations with petitions emanating from the German minority in Poland, encouraged the German-controlled Free City of Danzig to quarrel continually with Warsaw, and employed all the propaganda tools at her disposal to inflame public opinion and harrass the Polish government.<sup>5</sup>

If Germany was determined to effect the revision of the Versailles system, France stood as the pillar under Versailles. Poland had turned to France in 1921 to conclude the Franco-Polish alliance which she regarded as the foundation of her international position.<sup>6</sup> A strong France meant a secure Poland. Yet the Versailles settlement was, in reality, an artificial imposition upon the normal pattern of European history and France soon found herself hard pressed to maintain it. The passage of time also beclouded Polish understanding of the contingencies of Poland's existence. With the advent of the Pilsudski regime in 1926, the Franco-Polish

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4. L. B. Namier, In The Nazi Era (London, 1952) p. 47.

5. Z. J. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XV, April 1955, p. 3.

6. Roman Debicki, Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939, (New York, 1962) p. 58.

alliance began to weaken. Alliances are strongest in the face of immediate danger and in 1926 Pilsudski did not expect a major upheaval in Europe within the next five years.<sup>7</sup> The new Polish ruling group, given at times to illusions of grandeur, resented what it considered a patronizing French attitude. Poland's internal financial problems negatively affected French investments, resulting in adverse political repercussions.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1930's the French will to support strenuously the Versailles system began to falter and by 1932, France had willingly abdicated leadership of the continent to Britain whose capacity for appeasement was shortly manifest and whose espousal of the Versailles was less than enthusiastic.<sup>9</sup>

1932 also saw a significant change in Poland's foreign policy. Apprehension about the increasingly apparent French tendency to pursue her own security without regard for the eastward stirrings of German revisionism led Pilsudski to alter fatefully the course of Polish diplomacy. Without ending the alliance with France, Pilsudski determined to assert Poland's independence in foreign affairs, hoping consequently to encourage European acceptance of Poland as a great power. This new policy reflected both the increasing internal stability of the Marshal's regime and his assessment of the

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7. Ibid, p. 57.

8. Ibid, p. 59.

9. Z. J. Gasiorowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" Journal of Modern History, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, June 1955 p. 138.



changing European situation.<sup>10</sup> It was followed by Poland for the next seven years until the second European conflagration. Ultimately, of course, the policy was not successful. In the first few years after its inception, the results were only illusory and Pilsudski's aims in undertaking this policy were never realized. Hitler accepted the chimera of Polish independence while it suited him to mark time and the European powers never considered Poland as one of them. The policy rested on false assumptions, assumptions engendered by the wholly artificial atmosphere of an inter-war Europe constructed at Versailles. When the Polish foreign minister, Jozef Beck, stated in a speech on February 15, 1933 that "nobody has as yet modified the status of Europe by words," he did not realize how right he was. For the Versailles settlement was essentially an attempt to change Europe through the language of diplomacy. On September 1, 1939, the failure of that language and Beck's unknowing prophecy were borne out at Poland's expense. In the final analysis, "Polish calculations were too clever by half."<sup>11</sup> This thesis deals, then, with those calculations.

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10. Ibid, p. 138.

11. L. B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude 1938-1939 (London, 1948) p. 4.

I: 1932-1935

"To whom should we marry Freedom, to make it multiply?"

Poland's new foreign policy of 1932 represented an attempt to take the initiative in matters of foreign affairs. Yet, since Poland's fundamental purpose was to maintain her security and independence, ultimately her foreign policy would be a series of responses and reactions to outside developments. Polish-German affairs depended almost exclusively on Germany. Beck said as much in his speech of February 15, 1933: "Polish-German relations are very simple: our attitude with regard to Germany will be exactly the same as Germany's attitude toward Poland."<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the decade, Polish relations with Germany were, at best, uneasy. The fiery speeches of the former German Minister for the Occupied Territories, Gottfried Treviranus, triggered a frenzied revisionist propaganda campaign directed against Poland. The catchword was Saisonstaat, which acidly described the prevalent German conception of Poland as a temporary state. In part, however, the campaign was intended to distract the German people from the persistent economic crises of the 1930's.<sup>2</sup>

Pilsudski, who had often observed that military and foreign affairs were the proper domain of the leader of any state, retained

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1. Quoted in Z. J. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XV, April 1955, p. 6.
  2. Roman Debicki, Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939 (New York, 1962), p. 69.

control of Polish foreign policy. His own revolutionary experience caused him to regard Russia as Poland's chief adversary and he was anxious, therefore, to improve Poland's relations with Germany.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, he ordered Alfred Wysocki, the Polish Minister to Berlin to ascertain the attitudes of the various German political parties as to the possibility of improved relations. In 1931 and 1932, Wysocki met with important German politicians and learned, not surprisingly, that the Germans regarded frontier revision with Poland as the prerequisite for any improvement in relations.<sup>4</sup> August Zaleski, the Polish foreign minister at this time, made several overtures for a German-Polish treaty to no avail.<sup>5</sup> The internal situation in Germany precluded any softening of the government's attitude toward Poland. 1932 brought a presidential election and two Reichstag elections and the revisionist campaign mounted in fury as the political parties attempted to outdo each other in clamoring for change. At the Disarmament Conference which convened in Geneva in February, 1932, Germany presented her revisionist aims and demanded equality of armaments with the great powers. Pilsudski, who viewed the internal political crisis in Germany with a certain satisfaction for he considered that it weakened Germany's aggressive power in the external sphere, was disturbed by proceedings in Geneva.<sup>6</sup> He

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3. Hans Roos, A History of Modern Poland (New York, 1966), p. 125.
  4. Z. J. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XV, April 1955, p. 5.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Ibid.

feared nothing so much as German rearmament which would result, in his view, in the internal unification of the German people and enable Germany, by utilizing the strategic advantages of her eastern frontiers, to press successfully for the revision of the Polish-German boundary.<sup>7</sup> France, the upholder of the Versailles treaty, yielded to British pressure on December 11, 1932, and recognized in principle the German claim to equality of rights in armaments in order to bring the disgruntled Germans back to the conference. This first major crack in the Versailles system produced a furious reaction in Poland who now revised her estimate of the reliability of the French alliance.

The success of German revisionism and the increasingly apparent tendency of the Western powers to accept Germany's re-armament demands convinced Pilsudski to impress both sides with a show of strength--a display he knew the Germans would not fail to appreciate.<sup>8</sup> By temperament a soldier, Pilsudski understood very well the mechanics of deterrence and provocation. He would not go too far. His subsequent actions are a model of the artfully contrived provocation undertaken in view of a predetermined end. In March, 1932, Pilsudski ordered troop concentrations in the area of East Prussia.<sup>9</sup> Next he decided to use the Danzig situation to demonstrate that Poland would protect her interests by force if necessary. On July 14,

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7. Roos, p. 129.

8. Gasiorowski, p. 5.

9. Roos, p. 129.

1932, the destroyer "Wicher" entered the harbor of Danzig ostensibly to pay a courtesy visit to a small British flotilla at anchor in the port. One of Poland's treaty rights with regard to Danzig was to represent it in foreign affairs and the Poles claimed the "Wicher" intended to perform this function.<sup>10</sup> The destroyer's commander had instructions to react forcibly to any insult to his colors. Moreover, the rights of the Polish navy in the port of Danzig were unspecified as well as under discussion in the League of Nations at the time. The Danzig Senate, which earlier had threatened to treat Polish warships at anchor in Danzig as those of a foreign power, strongly protested. The maneuver aroused great indignation in the Council of the League, while France and Britain particularly exerted significant pressure on the Polish foreign minister, Zaleski, to withdraw the "Wicher." The Polish government, in response, declared that it did not intend to attack Danzig.<sup>11</sup> The incident resulted in an agreement between Poland and Danzig which provided for the priority of the Polish navy in the port. Zaleski, a strong advocate of Poland's participation in the League of Nations, was embarrassed by the League's attitude of censure toward Poland and apparently determined to resign in light of the "Wicher" incident.<sup>12</sup>

On November 2, 1932, Jozef Beck replaced Zaleski who had in-

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10. Z. J. Gasiorowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" Journal of Modern History, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, June 1955, p. 139.
  11. Debicki, pp. 63f.
  12. Jozef Beck, Final Report (New York, 1957), p. 15. Apparently, Zaleski had been prohibited from resigning in protest over the "Wicher." Beck says "the change in the post of Foreign Minister was in principle agreed upon between the Marshal and the Minister, but not before the beginning of 1933." p. 15.

sisted on leaving office.<sup>13</sup> He was to remain as foreign minister until the cataclysmic end in September, 1939. After Pilsudski's death in May, 1935, Beck became the principal architect of Polish foreign policy. In short, Beck's most important assignment was to paralyze the German demand for military parity so as to maintain the existing superiority of the Polish army.<sup>14</sup> He brought to this task certain preconceptions which would color his subsequent policy and certain mannerisms which hindered the acceptance of his policies in foreign capitals.

Beck's foreign policy flowed from a set of axioms and views of the European situation which he took to be of Pilsudskian heritage. Surprisingly, Beck scorned the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, instruments which had brought Poland into existence and were supposed to safeguard that existence. Beck considered Woodrow Wilson "an opinionated reformer," a parliamentarian rather than a diplomat.<sup>15</sup> He felt that the weakness of the Versailles Treaty stemmed from two major factors in its formulation. First, the "parliamentarians" at Versailles were given to amplifying every decision and arrangement with explanations of motivation and cause open to, indeed conducive to, rebuttal and debate. Under the "old diplomacy," concessions were made automatically by a country which had lost a

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13. Ibid., p. 17.

14. Roos, p. 129.

15. H. L. Roberts, "The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck," in The Diplomats 1919-1939 (Princeton, 1953), Craig and Gilbert, eds. p. 584.

war. Treaties did not contain "dangerous theoretical arguments."<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the Versailles settlement lacked any order of precedence or established hierarchy defining the degree of importance of the various clauses. In Pilsudski's view, which Beck likewise adopted, the territorial settlement and the limitation of German armaments were the principal considerations of the treaty and should have been so regarded by the European powers. Thus sanctions and collective measures should have been designed and reserved for the protection of these vital clauses. Instead, a pre-occupation with matters of secondary importance obliterated the comparative value of the clauses and tended to undermine the indispensable portions of the treaty.<sup>17</sup>

If Beck disliked the Treaty of Versailles, he felt even more hostile toward the League of Nations. He considered the League powerless without the presence of the United States. The pretensions of the League to concern itself with the internal affairs of small states through the minorities treaties ran counter to Beck's conception of Poland's place in Europe. He distrusted the 'Concert of Europe' principle implicit in the League's effective functioning, for he felt that the interests of the smaller states were compromised. The League's meddling had the effect of disorganizing the internal stability of the smaller states. Beck envisioned three categories of states in Europe: great powers, small powers with a will to pursue their own policy, and client states. He placed Poland in the second category, though he denied that Poland was a great

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16. Beck, p. 44 and pp. 239f.

17. Ibid., pp. 240f.

power in the sense of having other than European interests. The League's supervision of Danzig also irritated Beck for he felt that the Treaty of Versailles should have entrusted that function to Poland.<sup>18</sup> The Polish Foreign Minister's attitude toward the European settlement and the European community determined subsequent policy. "In practical terms, of course, the refusal to rely on the League or to admit of the benefits of great power paternalism meant that Poland must acquire allies, either among the states of Eastern Europe or in the West."<sup>19</sup> This she set out to do with Beck as the chief engineer.

Beck soon acquired a reputation for deviousness in the conduct of foreign affairs. Notwithstanding the fact that the western powers looked upon the new course of Polish diplomacy as unwelcome, his fellow diplomats found him evasive and tortuous in his methods.<sup>20</sup> At one time Beck had been an intelligence officer and he displayed much of the same technique as a diplomat. One journalist, to whom Beck granted an interview, described him as an "eel."<sup>21</sup> His memoirs, however, convey the impression that he operated on what he considered to be simple premises. Beck's problem, then, was one of

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18. Beck gives an extensive account of his view of the League of Nations in a special section devoted to the League in his memoirs. Beck, Final Report, pp. 242-254.

19. Roberts, p. 589.

20. Leon Noel, French ambassador to Warsaw, cited in Roberts, p. 581.

21. Louis Fischer, Men and Politics: Europe Between the Two World Wars (New York, 1966), pp. 290f.



communication.

Autumn, 1931, saw the beginning of a period marked by the easing of tensions on Poland's eastern frontier. The Japanese aggression in Manchuria forced the attentions of Russia to the Far East and necessitated a radical change in the deployment of the Red Army.<sup>22</sup> The Russians decided to mend their fences in Europe. The Poles, meanwhile, were in the throes of the depression and hoped for the extension of commercial relations with their neighbors.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the period of French ascendancy in Europe was, for all practical purposes, at an end and the Poles now decided to reappraise their relations with their two powerful neighbors. In view of the snowballing revisionist campaign in Germany, prospects for a quick settlement of Polish differences with Germany appeared dim. But Pilsudski perceived that he might provide a greater impetus for an understanding with Berlin by playing the Russian card.<sup>24</sup> The Poles had few illusions about Russia's dependability as an ally. Beck was not at all enthusiastic about dealing bilaterally with the Soviets for he regarded Russia as a dangerous power and denied that it would serve as an effective counterweight to Germany.<sup>25</sup> Yet expediency made a rapprochement desirable to both sides. The Poles intended to use the agreement to bludgeon Germany into a pact and quiet Ger-

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22. B. B. Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations 1932-1939 (New York, 1963), p. 8.

23. Ibid., p. 25.

24. Ibid., p. 9.

25. Roberts, pp. 607f.

man revisionist propaganda. The nascent Russian desire for international co-operation was motivated by fear of Japan rather than concern over German re-armament or affection for Poland.<sup>26</sup> A Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact was duly concluded and signed in Moscow on July 25, 1932, by Stanislaw Patek, the Polish ambassador to the U.S.S.R., and by N. N. Krestinskii, acting People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Moscow and Warsaw simultaneously ratified the pact on December 23, 1932.

Polish diplomacy, nevertheless indicated a deep mistrust of Russia. Pilsudski was always preoccupied with the Russian danger, a feeling on which the Germans attempted to capitalize shortly. The Russians, likewise, realized that Poland intended to use the new pact to force German concessions and, consequently, considered the pact as a sham rapprochement.<sup>27</sup>

German reaction to the new Polish-Soviet pact was outwardly calm. The German press described the pact as a positive step and denied that it endangered the Rapallo policy or affected German-Soviet relations in any significant way.<sup>28</sup> The Weimar republic was tottering on the brink of collapse and Germany's attention turned to the call of national fascism.

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power. Germany's national life was instantly revolutioned--and with it, her diplo-

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26. Budurowycz, p. 18.

27. Ibid., p. 10.

28. Ibid., p. 20.

macy. Hitler's rapid ascent caused little alarm in Polish ruling circles. The Poles made much of the fact that Hitler was an Austrian. Pilsudski's own group had fought at the side of Austria in the First World War and consequently was inclined to believe that Germany's traditional hostility to Poland was a Prussian phenomenon. Pilsudski himself anticipated that Hitler would focus his attention on Austria, thus relieving the pressure on Poland and increasing her importance as a force in international politics. The new regime's preoccupation with the revolutionary transformation of Germany would, in Polish opinion, take time and would in the interim weaken Germany as a significant force in external affairs. Pilsudski clearly preferred Hitler to Stresemann, Schleicher, or Brüning. Another favorable aspect of Naziism was its anti-Communist fervor which appealed to a Poland justifiably suspicious of Bolshevik intentions.<sup>29</sup> Beck had confidence in Hitler's foreign policy. He anticipated that Hitler would attempt to take Austria and Czechoslovakia, yet did not foresee any subsequent danger to Poland.<sup>30</sup> Some question did exist, however, whether Polish popular opinion agreed with the government's viewpoint. Count Jan Szembek, the Polish Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, comments in his diary that the Polish people always demonstrated a hostility to Germany while, in contrast, viewed France and the Soviet Union with friendliness.<sup>31</sup>

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29. An excellent discussion of Poland's attitude toward Hitler can be found in Z. J. Gasiorowski's "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XV, April 1955 upon which I have drawn heavily.

30. Roberts, p. 602.

31. Jan Szembek, Journal, 1933-1939 (Paris, 1952), p. 172.

Hitler opened his relations with Poland by demanding revision of the frontiers and by making claims on the Polish corridor in a speech on February 2, 1933. Yet the need for vehement propaganda against Poland had passed with the Nazi election victory which it helped attain. Neither Hitler nor Pilsudski was greatly affected by the vagaries of public opinion any more. They could settle down to talk with little worry about popular reaction.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Hitler was fascinated with Pilsudski's personality, regarding him as a dictator of his own stamp.<sup>33</sup> On February 8, 1933, Hitler held his first cabinet meeting at the Reich Chancellery. He stressed that Germany's aim for the next four or five years was solely to build up the armed forces. Therefore these years would be used to mollify Germany's neighbors, pursue a policy of peace, and quietly restore the power of the Reich.<sup>34</sup> The subsequent thaw in Polish-German relations suited Hitler as much, if not more than, it suited the Poles.

The Nazi victory, however, had increased tensions in Danzig, considered by Pilsudski as the 'barometer' of Polish-German relations.<sup>35</sup> On February 15, 1933, the day Beck was again professing his faith in the harmonious character of Polish-German affairs, the

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32. W. F. Reddaway et al., eds., The Cambridge History of Poland, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1951), p. 607.

33. Roos, p. 130.

34. E. M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans 1933-1939 (New York, 1967), p. 9.

35. Roberts, p. 600.

Danzig Senate notified the Polish government of its decision to abrogate unilaterally the agreement of 1923 and to withdraw the detachment of harbor police, replacing this with its own force. The Danzig harbor police force was subordinate to the Harbor Board which consisted of a mixed Danzig-Polish commission with a Swiss chairman. Poland would have no control over the new force. Pilsudski determined to act swiftly. The action he contemplated would serve as a reprisal against Danzig's action in the matter of the harbor police, as a precautionary measure against any possible attempt by the Nazi paramilitary organization there to damage Polish interests, and as a warning to Hitler, as well as Danzig, that Poland would not refrain from the use of force in the preservation of her rights.<sup>36</sup> Once again, Pilsudski, the master of the carefully contrived military provocation, hit upon an eminently successful plan.

On March 6, 1933, the morning after the election which confirmed Hitler's predominance in Germany, the Poles landed a contingent of one hundred twenty soldiers to reinforce the Polish garrison at Westerplatte, a small peninsula which commanded the mouth of the harbor of Danzig. The date for the action was well chosen. Pilsudski realized that Hitler, engaged in an election campaign, might have been forced to react militarily to the Polish challenge in view of the fact that the Polish reinforcements had not been authorized by the League of Nations or the League's High Commissioner in Danzig.<sup>37</sup> Beck, who did not mind flouting League authority,

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36. Gasiorowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" p. 142.

37. Ibid.

writes that the action "was meant as a psychological test which would have a preventive character regarding the activities of the future Führer of the German Reich. . ."38 The element of surprise had worked in Poland's favor. The Germans were taken aback, and the Nazi victory celebration was spoiled.39

Amid the shrill protests of Danzig and equally loud remonstrances from Berlin, Poland did not budge. She refused the League High Commissioner's demand that she withdraw the unauthorized military force. Finally, as tension increased alarmingly, on March 13, the League succeeded in resolving the conflict by a compromise under which Poland and Danzig would restore the situation which had existed prior to February 15. On March 15 and 16, Poland withdrew the supplementary detachment. Significantly, Hitler did not call Pilsudski's bluff. The Marshal's plan had apparently succeeded. And the Westerplatte affair became the turning point which presaged the rapid drawing together of Germany and Poland.40

Meanwhile, there were ominous stirrings among the other powers. On the same day the Poles completed the withdrawal of their expeditionary force at Westerplatte, Prime Minister MacDonald of Britain suggested to the Disarmament Conference a plan which over a period of five years would bring Germany to effective military parity with France, Italy, and Poland. Though the plan did not fully satisfy

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38. Beck, p. 22.

39. Gasiorowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" p. 142.

40. Reddaway, et al., eds., p. 608.

any of the participants, it was accepted as a basis for discussion. Poland considered the MacDonald program reprehensible for it would jeopardize her security by weakening the European system to the advantage of Russia and Germany.<sup>41</sup>

Two days later, March 18, Mussolini proposed what came to be known as the Four Power Pact. France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany entered into an arrangement which, in its original Italian version, mentioned the possibility of territorial revision. Poland interpreted the pact to presage a revision of the Polish-German boundary as the price of German co-operation. Anxiety for Poland's security prompted Pilsudski to intensify his efforts to obtain a settlement with Germany, before the West had gone too far along the road of appeasement. The Poles also considered their prestige to be at stake. Though traditionally friendly with Italy, they regarded her lightly among the powers. Consequently, their chagrin at being left out of the eventual Four Power Pact increased.<sup>42</sup> Pilsudski indicated his displeasure with the situation by ordering his recently appointed ambassador to Rome, Count Jerzy Potocki, to resign in protest. The pact was signed on July 25, 1933, but the four signatory governments never ratified it.

Mussolini's proposal further exacerbated the Franco-Polish alliance. The Poles believed that France sought to come to terms in-

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41. Gasiowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" p. 144.

42. Ibid., pp. 144f.

dependently with the Third Reich.<sup>43</sup> The necessity for a rapprochement with Germany became more compelling. Pilsudski determined to achieve this end by flourishing the olive branch and sword at the same time. On the one hand, he would secretly approach Hitler with the aim of reaching an understanding and, on the other, he would openly threaten the use of force.<sup>44</sup> The tactics adopted by Pilsudski in this diplomatic offensive gave rise to the widespread opinion that he proposed a preventive war against Germany to the French. The fact is that such a suggestion was never made. Though Pilsudski might have toyed with the idea, he never could have considered it seriously. First, Poland's economic and military posture precluded any possibility of embarking on a war or definitive police action. Second, France's participation in any such adventure was neither plausible nor probable. Third, Pilsudski did not regard Hitler as particularly dangerous nor did he expect that Germany would seriously violate the disarmament stipulations of the Peace Treaty.<sup>45</sup> By the autumn of 1933, Beck had prepared a memorandum which concluded that the Nazi victory in Germany did not endanger Polish-German relations. He based that conclusion on four observations: 1.) that the Nazi movement was truly revolutionary and reform-minded, 2.) that reformers are interested primarily in internal change which

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43. Roberts, p. 594.

44. Gasiorowski, "Did Pilsudski Attempt to Initiate a Preventive War in 1933?" p. 145.

45. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," pp. 11f.



necessitates a long period of external calm, 3.) that Hitler as an Austrian without any Prussian figures among his direct collaborators would not pursue an anti-Polish policy, and 4.) that Hitlerism as a movement was the last act in the unification of the German people.<sup>46</sup> Marshal Pilsudski's chief counsellor on foreign affairs was, then, far from anticipating the eventual virulence of Naziism. Furthermore, no evidence has been found in Poland of any memorandum addressed by Pilsudski to the French regarding the specific proposal of a pre-emptive first strike against Germany.<sup>47</sup> The French premier, Edouard Daladier, the foreign minister, Paul-Boncour, and the head of the French army in 1933, General Weygand all have denied knowledge of Pilsudski's alleged proposal.<sup>48</sup> Beck makes no mention of any proposed joint or single attack against Germany in his memoirs. Neither does Léon Noël, French ambassador to Warsaw.<sup>49</sup>

Yet rumors of the possibility of Polish action against Germany were rampant at the time. Hitler himself, as early as 1932, in a letter written to Colonel Walter von Reichenau, chief of staff for the military district of East Prussia, alluded to the possibility of a Polish attack, encouraged or supported by France.<sup>50</sup> And in

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46. Beck, p. 25.

47. Roberts, p. 612.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., p. 613.

50. Robertson, pp. 4f.

March, 1933, General Adam, chief of the disguised German General Staff (Truppenamt), insisted in a secret memorandum that Germany could not successfully fight a war in the east.<sup>51</sup> While the Poles did nothing to discourage the rumors, Hitler could not have been completely sure they were not bluffing. Pilsudski continued his dual diplomatic offensive on April 21, 1933 by staging a parade of thirty five thousand men in full battle order to commemorate the fourteenth anniversary of the liberation of Vilna. The Germans were now in a mood to take notice.

Yet a German-Polish rapprochement was impossible without German acquiescence regardless how hard Poland might try to attain it. ultimately, the initiative lay in Hitler's hands. The Führer agreed fundamentally with the directive General Hans von Seeckt, father of the Reichswehr, addressed to the German foreign office in 1922: "Poland's existence is intolerable, incompatible with the essential conditions of Germany's life. Poland must go and will go . . . Poland's obliteration must be one of the fundamental drives of German policy."<sup>52</sup> Hitler's sweeping 'Eastern Conception' as well as the 'Bodenpolitik' of the future included Poland in their realization. He envisioned Poland as an associate sharing in the spoils of victory or as an enemy whose destruction would make way for a move against Russia.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the improvement of relations with

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51. Ibid., p. 10.

52. Cited in William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, (New York, 1962), p. 295.

53. Budurowycz, p. 38.

Poland suited him as well as Pilsudski, though the Marshal sought a permanent rapprochement.<sup>54</sup> For Hitler, such an improvement would allay the suspicions of both Western and Eastern Europe aroused by his hasty exit from the Disarmament Conference. Through the vehicle of the direct bilateral negotiation he could bypass the League of Nations, cast a further shadow on the credibility of the Franco-Polish alliance, and deal a blow to the concept of collective security.<sup>55</sup> The technique of Schlummerlied would lull the Western powers into a false sense of security by reassuring them of Germany's peaceful intentions. Hitler's own propaganda offensive would begin.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, Hitler set the stage by ordering Danzig to ease its relations with Poland. The National Socialist Party of Danzig had won a sweeping election victory on May 28 and its leaders, Hermann Rauschning and Artur Greiser, President and Vice President respectively of the Danzig Senate, adopted a conciliatory attitude. In early July, 1933, Rauschning visited Warsaw and spoke glowingly about the possibilities of collaboration between Poland and Danzig.<sup>57</sup> In June, 1933, Hitler ended all cooperation between the Reichswehr and the Red Army. This renunciation of the Soviet Union almost

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54. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," p. 10.

55. Shirer, p. 296.

56. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, Prologue to Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 217.

57. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," p. 16.

necessitated the restoration of good relations with Poland. Hitler clearly realized that Germany's Polish policy was a function of Germany's Russian policy and a break with the latter demanded friendly relations with the former.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, Poland also actively pursued rapprochement. Alfred Wysocki, the Polish minister in Berlin, requested an interview with Hitler, on Pilsudski's orders, which was arranged for May 2. The day before, May 1, Pilsudski granted one of his infrequent audiences to the Russian ambassador to Warsaw, Antonov-Ovseenko, in a move calculated to impress Berlin more than Moscow.<sup>59</sup> The Hitler-Wysocki interview marked a significant turning point in Polish-German relations. Wysocki drew Hitler's attention to the existing tension between the two countries and the inflamed situation in Danzig. He affirmed Poland's determination to defend her rights in Danzig and her access to the sea. In conclusion, he asked Hitler to disavow the possibility of any German encroachment upon those rights. Hitler's reply was remarkable in its duplicity. Germany, he said, under his leadership had not "the least intention of violating existing treaties," which he regarded as binding upon the Reich. Hitler, a fervent nationalist who understood Polish nationalism, was a pacifist as well. He did not "share the view which questions Poland's right to exist . . ."<sup>60</sup> On May 3, 1933, both governments issued a

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58. Roos, p. 130.

59. Budurowycz, p. 28.

60. Poland, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Official Documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933-1939. The Polish White Book (London, 1939), pp. 11ff.

communique which read, in part: "The Reich Chancellor emphasized the firm intention of the German Government to adhere strictly in their attitude and their actions to the terms of existing treaties. The Chancellor expressed the wish that the two countries should dispassionately investigate and deal with their common interests."<sup>61</sup> The way appeared open to the improvement of relations.

On July 13, Wysocki obtained a farewell interview with Hitler in which substantially the same sentiments were exchanged. Pilsudski had transferred Wysocki to Rome and replaced him with Jozef Lipski, who presented his credentials to Hindenburg on October 18, 1933, declaring that he would strive to improve Polish-German relations along the lines enunciated in the Hitler-Wysocki interview of May 2.<sup>62</sup>

The summer and autumn witnessed substantial and tangible improvement in relations, particularly in regard to Danzig. Direct Polish-Danzig negotiations resulted in four agreements, concluded on August 4 and September 18, which regulated the use of the port of Danzig by the Poles and acknowledged the rights of Polish citizens there. In return, Poland agreed to share her trade equally between Danzig and Gdynia, the only other Polish outlet to the sea. Finally on September 22, the Polish Premier, Janusz Jędrzejewicz, visited Danzig to exchange mutual congratulations and return the

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61. Germany, The German Library of Information, Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War (New York, 1940), p. 48.

62. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," p. 20.

courtesy of Rauschning's trip to Warsaw in July.

October brought a new and disturbing development. Germany announced her withdrawal from both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations on October 14. Poland felt that her security was threatened by this latest German maneuver. Concern about the possibilities of German rearmament prompted Pilsudski to call a special military conference, attended by Beck and Szembek, for the purpose of assessing Germany's military posture. Pilsudski also decided to consult French army intelligence, whose subsequent report bore out the Polish intelligence service's expectations. The progress of German rearmament had not as yet reached alarming proportions.<sup>63</sup> Apparently the Polish and French information was accurate. Until the summer of 1934 the German rearmament effort did not seriously exceed the limits delineated in the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>64</sup> Yet the Poles greatly underestimated the regenerative strength of the Reich. Beck's prognosis that Hitler would need some time to consolidate his power and effect internal reform most probably contributed in 1933 to the general feeling of minimizing the possibilities for a speedy German recovery. Pilsudski himself was not overly impressed with Hitler's capabilities.<sup>65</sup>

On November 15, 1933, the new Polish ambassador in Berlin, Jozef Lipski, met with Hitler. The interview paved the way for

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63. Ibid., pp. 19f.

64. Robertson, p. 17.

65. Gasiorowski, "The German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of 1934," p. 20. Cf. Beck, p. 25.

the subsequent nonaggression pact. The following joint communique was issued after the meeting: "Discussion of German-Polish relations revealed the complete agreement of both governments in their intention to deal with questions affecting both countries by way of direct negotiation, and further renounce all application of force in their mutual relations, with a view to strengthening European peace."<sup>66</sup> However, on November 24 in a telegram to the German minister in Warsaw, Hans Adolf von Konstantin Moltke, von Neurath, the Reich's Foreign Minister, stated explicitly that the declaration of the communique in no way implied "the recognition of Germany's existing eastern frontiers, but on the contrary articulates the fact that by means of this declaration a basis shall be created for the solution of all problems, i.e. also territorial problems."<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, on September 25, 1933, von Moltke had been ordered by von Bülow, the State Secretary at the Foreign Office, to open negotiations so as to end the costly economic war which both sides were waging with relish. Von Bülow instructed von Moltke that "the German Government are prepared to take this step, provided the Polish Government adopt a similar attitude."<sup>68</sup> The tariff war had originally broken out in January, 1925, when the economic clauses of the Versailles Treaty obliging Germany to grant unconditional most favored nation treatment to the Allies and Associated Powers,

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66. Polish White Book, p. 19.

67. Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War, p. 52.

68. Ibid., p. 50.

including Poland, expired. The Germans decided to make use of their economic preponderance to drive Poland, dependent on outside trade, to the verge of economic disaster. By fusing economic policy to political aims, they hoped to hasten Poland's demise.<sup>69</sup> This economic warfare, however, had the effect of accelerating the construction and development of the Polish maritime fleet, as well as of the port of Gdynia. By the 1930's Poland had diverted her trade in the direction of a transmarine export policy and assumed a greater measure of economic independence.<sup>70</sup> The onset of the depression undoubtedly hastened the willingness of both sides to come to terms. Thus economic negotiations proceeded against the background of the more glamorous political talks regarding a pact of nonaggression.

Von Moltke requested an audience with Pilsudski, which the latter granted on November 28. The German ambassador took the occasion to present Poland with a formal nonaggression proposal, which the Poles agreed to study. Pilsudski, though indicating his desire for an improvement in relations, cautioned von Moltke not to minimize "the thousand-year-old hostility of the Polish people to the Germans . . ."<sup>71</sup> In a secret meeting with Rauschnig on December 11, 1933, Pilsudski expressed his apprehensions about the inevitability of a Russo-Polish and Russo-German war and suggested that alliance

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69. Charles Kruszewski, "The German-Polish Tariff War and Its Aftermath," Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. III, No. 3., October, 1943, p. 303.

70. Ibid., p. 310.

71. Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War, pp. 53f.



between Germany and Poland might create the basis for the resolution of all pending frontier disputes.<sup>72</sup> A pact was now definitely in the offing.

On January 9 of the new year, Lipski presented to von Neurath a revised text of the nonaggression declaration. The Polish draft contained a clause which specifically excluded any application of the pact to questions "which according to international law lie within the exclusive competence of states."<sup>73</sup> This section encountered Neurath's disapproval. He expected that the object of such a provision would be to remove the question of the treatment of the German minority in Poland from subsequent discussions between the two governments.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the Germans referred the new Polish counter proposal to the legal department of their Foreign Office for further study. On the 20th of January, Lipski assured Gaus, the head of the German Foreign Office's legal department, that the Poles had no such intention. He pointed to Polish popular concern about the treatment of Jews in Germany, indicating clearly that the Polish government did not consider intervention in the internal affairs of Germany as proper.<sup>75</sup> Lipski thereupon proposed a new wording for the controversial section of the agreement: "Both Governments establish that this declaration does not extend to those

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72. Budurowycz, pp. 40f.

73. Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War,  
p. 54.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid., p. 55.

questions which under international law are to be regarded exclusively as the internal concern of one of the two States."<sup>76</sup> The Germans accepted this revision and a declaration of nonaggression was signed in Berlin by von Neurath and Lipski on January 26, 1934. Both governments affirmed their intention to settle all questions which concern their mutual relations directly. If that proved impossible in some cases, they would seek a solution by other peaceful means but under no circumstances would "they resort to force in the settlement of such disputes."<sup>77</sup> The agreement did not affect any international obligations which either government had previously undertaken toward a third party. Valid for ten years, the declaration mentioned specifically its contribution to the well-being of Europe.

The German-Polish nonaggression pact ended the political antagonism between the two countries. Hitler appeared to give up his revisionist policy vis-à-vis the Poles and in any case stopped his vocal support of the German minority in Poland.<sup>78</sup> The agreement also led to the signing of a protocol in Warsaw on March 7, 1934, which did away with many economic restrictions and prohibitions that both states had enforced during their trade war. Thus mutual trade and commerce were effectively freed from the fetters which had prevented their free play. Subsequent negotiations between Germany and Poland resulted in the conclusion of a compensation agreement

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76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., p. 56.

78. Roos, p. 131.

on October 11, 1934, serving as a forerunner of a regular trade agreement. Finally on November 4, 1935, a trade agreement, constructed upon a limited most-favored-nation basis, was signed, putting a formal end to the ten year tariff war.<sup>79</sup>

Yet Hitler was the real gainer in the German-Polish nonaggression pact, since the agreement loosened the Franco-Polish alliance and smoothed the path to German rearmament.<sup>80</sup> Polish friendship with Germany placed a strain upon relations with Czechoslovakia which led to mutual recriminations concerning the alleged mistreatment of minorities.<sup>81</sup> The pact also helped to free the Germans from any serious preoccupation with frontier defense in the east.<sup>82</sup> Hitler had merely shelved the Polish problem while German military staffs could plan the destruction of the nation they had always despised. The Führer had given the Marshal the promise that Polyphemus gave Ulysses: that he would be the last to be eaten.<sup>83</sup>

The German-Polish agreement also weakened the now long ago spirit of Rapallo. The Soviets had attempted to establish a community of interests with the European states on their borders. The Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact of 1932 was the principal manifestation of the new Russian diplomacy. Naturally, the German-Polish agreement gave the Russians cause for alarm.<sup>84</sup> Pilsudski and Beck

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79. Kruszewski, pp. 313f.

80. Roos, p. 131.

81. Reddaway, et al., p. 608.

82. Robertson, p. 43.

83. Ibid., p. 27.

84. Roos, pp. 131f.

realized the new situation created by their success with Germany necessitated pursuit of a policy of balance between her neighbors if Poland were not to become a satellite state. In order to quiet Moscow's suspicions, the aging Marshal directed Beck to go personally to Moscow in February, 1934. Once again, Pilsudski timed his diplomatic offensive well. Beck would be in Moscow before the Berlin declaration was formally ratified with instructions to suggest an extension of the 1932 agreement along lines parallel to the recently concluded German-Polish pact. Ostensibly, Beck would return the visit which Chicherin had paid to Warsaw in 1926.<sup>85</sup>

The Polish foreign minister received a grand reception in Moscow. For the first time in history the Polish National Anthem was played officially in the capital of Russia. The luncheons and formal state dinners imitated, according to Beck, the splendor of the old Tsarist receptions. The Russians treated their Polish visitor to a special command performance of the Moscow opera.<sup>86</sup> And although Beck left Moscow with pleurisy, he had succeeded in laying the groundwork for the extension of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression agreement for a period of ten years. The Soviet government approved this new version of the pact of 1932 on May 5, 1934. With that, the principle of the policy of balance had been implemented. Yet the Poles failed to realize that this policy represented an unstable balance resting on the antagonism between Germany and Russia which became increasingly evident in 1934.

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85. Ibid.

86. Beck, pp. 51ff.

Immediately after the ratification of the new Soviet pact, Pilsudski called a secret meeting of Polish political and military leaders to assess the course of Polish foreign policy.<sup>87</sup> He told this conference at the Belvedere Palace that the negotiation of the two nonaggression agreements "created for Poland an exceptionally favorable conjuncture unknown in history."<sup>88</sup> The Marshal stressed Poland's still precarious position and suggested the necessity of determining which of Poland's two big neighbors would threaten her security first. The conferees generally expected that the Soviet Union possessed the capability to launch an attack against Poland much sooner than Germany. The Poles, who subconsciously understood the venturesome nature of their foreign policy, couched their assessment of the situation in optimistic terms: "Germany had more to lose by a risky gamble."<sup>89</sup> Yet the fundamental aims of Polish foreign policy demanded a much more thorough approach and a precise analysis of German and Soviet potential. So Pilsudski created, in June, 1934, a secret bureau headed by General Kazimierz Fabrycy devoted to the specialized study of Germany and Russia.<sup>90</sup>

The bureau's first report indicated a measure of disagreement among the Polish military about the strength of the German army. Some considered the Reichswehr as the paramount threat to Poland's security, but a vast majority of military leaders, supported by

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87. Ibid., p. 57.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid., pp. 59ff.

90. Budurowycz, pp. 47f.

Pilsudski and Beck, rejected this appraisal of the situation. In Pilsudski's opinion, Russia's standing army of approximately 1,300,000 men was much more impressive than the largely inexperienced troops of the Reichswehr.<sup>91</sup> In the event of war with Germany, Poland, France's bastion on the Vistula, expected the vigorous support of France and her allies. War with Russia would not bring such speedy aid. These observations led to the concentration of Poland's defensive effort on her eastern frontier.<sup>92</sup> Militarily, Poland was turning her back on Nazi Germany. Moreover, the two nonaggression pacts were eroding the major assumption that justified Polish tactics. The Poles made little effort to strengthen the French alliance, yet depended on it as their defense in the west.

In September, 1934, Poland took another step which incurred French displeasure. Soviet entry into the League of Nations prompted Beck to denounce the minorities provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Concerned about the possibility of Russian meddling in internal Polish affairs, he announced to the Assembly of the League that Poland would refuse any cooperation with international organizations in any system of minority protection unless that system were made general and uniform. Beck admittedly did not expect the League's compliance with the Polish demand. He effectively denied, then, the right of the League to deal with the Polish minorities problem.<sup>93</sup> As a consequence, relations with France became even less

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91. Ibid., p. 48.

92. Ibid., p. 49.

93. Roberts, pp. 585f.

cordial.

The Germans, meanwhile, continued the promising courtship of Poland. Hitler had been interested for some time in the creation of a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. And Poland figured principally in his plans. Given at the time to friendly persuasion, he attempted to resurrect the fear of Poland's vulnerability to the 'Soviet danger.'<sup>94</sup> German diplomats began to trill the siren song of German-Polish cooperation to repel the barbaric Russian hordes. Actually, Hitler had referred to the supposed belligerence of the Soviet Union in his interviews with Wysocki in May and July, 1933, as well as in his prolonged interview with Lipski on November 15, 1933. He described Poland then as an "outpost against Asia." Goebbels had expressed similar sentiments in a meeting with Beck at Geneva in October, 1933, going so far as to mention the possibility of a German-Polish alliance with the view of common action in the Ukraine.<sup>95</sup> The policy of balance precluded, however, anything more than passing flirtation with either Germany or Russia. So Beck responded coolly.

While Hitler and Mussolini met in Venice in the middle of June, 1934, Goebbels paid an official visit to Warsaw. His mission was to prepare the ground for future collaboration.<sup>96</sup> But the bullets of a Ukrainian assassin who shot and killed Bronislaw Pieracki, the Polish Interior Minister, negated any success Goebbels might have at-

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94. Budurowycz, pp. 38f.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., p. 50.

tained. For Warsaw suspected German involvement in the assassination and turned a deaf ear to German exhortations.<sup>97</sup> And although, Pilsudski's last staff memorandum of 1934 clearly indicates his view of the Soviet Union as Poland's principal enemy, he resisted the idea of any joint Polish-German military action. Pilsudski rightly considered that Poland could not win in such a venture. In case of defeat Poland would suffer Russian vengeance, in case of victory, serfdom at the hands of Germany.<sup>98</sup>

Polish opposition to the concept of an Eastern Locarno encouraged the Germans to try again.<sup>99</sup> On January 22, 1935, Hitler used the occasion of a reception at the Reichskanzlei to warn Lipski about Russian armament gains and the impending danger of Russian aggression.<sup>100</sup> A few days after this conversation, Göring made one of his famous hunting trips to Poland. Stopping in Bialowieza and in Warsaw, he sought to test the reaction of Polish ruling circles to the blunt invitation of an invasion of the Soviet Union. He proposed the division of Soviet territory into Polish and German spheres of influence, offering the Ukraine to the Poles. In addition, he tacitly hinted at the possibility of German-Russian collusion in a new partition of Poland, hastening to affirm, however, his revulsion at the thought of a German-Russian frontier.<sup>101</sup> The Poles, taken

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97. Ibid.

98. Roos, p. 132.

99. Budurowycz, p. 66.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid., pp. 67f.



aback, countered by answering that the length of the Polish-Soviet border and their military posture precluded any policy which could lead to the revival of tension in that area.<sup>102</sup> Göring left unsuccessful, but the handwriting was on the wall.

On March 9, 1935, Hitler blew the cover of secrecy off the process of German rearmament by announcing the existence of a German air force. The next Saturday, March 16, he reintroduced conscription by decree, increasing the strength of the German armed forces to some 550,000 men. German rearmament prompted Britain to urge the conclusion of an Eastern Locarno. Poland had rejected the original French proposal for it would introduce a preponderant Soviet influence into Baltic and East European affairs. Furthermore, the Eastern Locarno arrangement (without German participation) would not insure Polish security.<sup>103</sup> This second effort, spearheaded by Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden, elicited a similar Polish response. Poland did join the Western powers in condemning Germany's violation of the Versailles treaty. Yet Pilsudski's prognosis that the Powers would do nothing to effectively counter German rearmament was borne out by the innocuous resolution which the League's Council passed. The resolution condemned Germany's action and spoke of a new threat to the security of Europe.<sup>104</sup> In addition to supporting the anti-German resolution, Warsaw instructed Lipski to present a tortuously worded protest in Berlin. The

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102. Ibid., p. 68.

103. Debicki, pp. 83f.

104. Ibid., p. 95.

Poles were not interested in exacerbating relations with Germany.<sup>105</sup> Beck might exalt his "extremely simple principles;" but the policy of balance, essentially riding two horses at once, was beginning to lead to some strenuous acrobatics.<sup>106</sup>

On May 12, 1935, Poland lost her guide in foreign affairs. An era came to an end. Marshal Pilsudski, long ill with cancer, died.

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105. Ibid., p. 93.

106. Roberts, p. 599.

II: May 12, 1935 - October 1, 1938

"Love of one's country recognizes no frontiers . . . of other countries."

The death of Marshal Pilsudski transferred the responsibility for guiding Poland's course in the world solely to Jozef Beck. Beck's close association with the late Marshal and Pilsudski's faith in him marked Beck as the old man's protege. Finally Beck's identification with the thaw in Polish-German relations and the Polish-German Nonaggression Pact persuaded President Ignace Moscicki to entrust him with the conduct of foreign affairs. The Polish Government feared that the appointment of a new Foreign Minister might be construed in Germany as a shift in policy.<sup>1</sup>

Pilsudski's funeral was the occasion of a flattering illustration of the new Poland's place in the world. The grief which swept Poland was mollified by pride in the number of foreign dignitaries who came to honor the Marshal. Pierre Laval and Marshal Pétain represented France, Field-Marshal Hermann Göring attended for Germany, and Rumania sent Marshal Presan. Göring took advantage of the solemn ceremonies to renew once again overtures previously made to Poland: that the common danger posed by the Soviet Union necessitated a closer community of interests between Germany and Poland. The funeral was also the setting for that memorable first acquaintance of Marshal Pétain with Göring, who discussed political affairs

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1. Debicki, p. 98.

with the French delegation for two hours.<sup>2</sup>

On May 21, 1935, Hitler, in a speech before the Reichstag, praised the Polish state as the home of a great, nationally conscious people and eschewed the violent assimilation of one nationality by another. Hitler considered the Polish-German Nonaggression Pact an immeasurable contribution to European peace and pledged that Germany would "blindly" observe the treaty.<sup>3</sup> The Führer also vowed that Germany would abide by the demilitarization of the Rhineland. In a stirring peroration, he prophesied that: "Whoever lights the torch of war in Europe can wish for nothing but chaos."<sup>4</sup> Yet, typically, Hitler's honeyed words came on the same day that he had taken another step toward conflict. For earlier on May 21, Hitler had promulgated the secret Reich Defense Law which placed Dr. Schacht in charge of the war economy and thoroughly reorganized the German armed forces. Under the law, the old Reichswehr became the Wehrmacht, Hitler assumed the title of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and the General Staff began more open operations.<sup>5</sup>

The Polish Ambassador to Berlin, Jozef Lipski, called on Hitler the following day, May 22, to thank the Führer and the German people for their manifestation of sympathy at Pilsudski's death. Hitler seized the occasion of the courtesy call to impress more deeply the Polish Government with his moderation. He told Lipski that

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2. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 286.
  3. Polish White Book, p. 28.
  4. Shirer, p. 395.
  5. Ibid., p. 393.

even before he seized power he had disagreed with Germany's negative attitude toward Poland, an attitude which, as Hitler took pains to point out, was propagated by the Prussian Generals von Schleicher and Gröner of the old Reichswehr. The present Minister of War, General von Blomberg, on the basis of his experience as a corps commander in East Prussia, supported the Führer's point of view. He assured Lipski that his Eastern policy sought only rapprochement with Poland. Though Germany needed areas for economic expansion and additional living space for her population, Poland could not provide either. In view of these greater problems facing Germany, Hitler felt the question of the "Corridor" was of "no importance whatsoever." He predicted that, given the continuance of good relations between Poland and Germany, the "Corridor" would be forgotten.<sup>6</sup>

In May, 1935, a serious crisis arose in Danzig, the "barometer" of Polish-German relations, when the Senate of the Free City devalued the local currency, the gulden. The devaluation led to the introduction of foreign currency control, including Polish legal tender, which meant the freezing of substantial Polish funds. A series of retaliatory and counter-retaliatory moves by Poland and Danzig served only to increase tensions and invite mutual recrimination.<sup>7</sup> In this uneasy atmosphere, Beck decided to visit Berlin.

The Polish Foreign Minister arrived in Berlin on July 3, 1935. He was greeted at the railway station by a guard of honor of the

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6. Polish White Book, p. 29.

7. Debicki, p. 100.

Reich Chancellor's S. S. Company. At the ceremony of the laying of a wreath on the grave of the Fallen Soldiers in Friedrichstrasse a company of the First Reichswehr Regiment marched past. Beck took due note of the fanfare, which, as he mused, was normally reserved for Western visitors.<sup>8</sup> His trip provided the Nazi chiefs with an opportunity to determine whether the changes in the Polish leadership could be exploited to Germany's advantage. Beck, however, refused to abandon his mentor's policies. He countered Hitler's suggestions of cooperation against the Soviet danger with the same arguments Pilsudski had used to thwart Goring's advances. Beck once again voiced Poland's determination to maintain the greatest possible independence by emphasizing that Poland would never become a tool of Russian policy either.<sup>9</sup> Beck's two day visit included talks with Goring, Goebbels, and von Blomberg, who assured the Polish Foreign Minister of the Reichswehr's increasingly friendly attitude toward Poland and even suggested direct cooperation between the two armies.<sup>10</sup> The official joint communiqué released at the end of Beck's stay in Berlin affirmed the value of the Nonaggression Pact of 1934 in maintaining friendly relations and in safeguarding the peace of Europe. Both governments, utilizing their friendly situation for close contact, would "devote all their energies to the cause of peace in Europe."<sup>11</sup>

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8. Beck, p. 93.

9. Budurowycz, p. 75.

10. Beck, p. 96.

11. Polish White Book, pp. 30f.

Beck's visit to Berlin also had the effect of ameliorating the Danzig situation. Ambassador Lipski's subsequent intervention with Hitler and Göring to use their influence to persuade the Danzig Senate to restore the gulden to its previous par value fell on listening ears. In August, 1935, Danzig re-established the economic situation that had existed prior to the dispute and a compromise was reached on financial questions.<sup>12</sup>

Friendly relations prevailed throughout the autumn of 1935, reaching a climax on November 4, 1935, when a trade treaty, based upon a limited most-favored-nation clause, was signed in Warsaw. The treaty was to expire on December 31, 1938. In September, Fritz Todt, the General Inspector of Roads in Germany, visited Warsaw and broached the idea of a German Autobahn through the "Corridor" so as to link the Reich with East Prussia by a land route. The Polish Deputy Minister of Transportation, Piasecki, discussed the possibility of convening a conference of experts from both sides at some future date: and the Poles allowed the idea to lapse until it was revived by Germany at a more ominous time.<sup>13</sup>

On December 18, 1935, Hitler once again attempted to pull Poland closer to the Nazi orbit by raising the specter of Soviet Russia. In an interview with Ambassador Lipski, the Führer declared that he was "resolutely opposed to drawing Russia into the West." He favored European solidarity, of course, but in his opinion that

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12. Debicki, p. 100.

13. United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Washington, 1953), Series D, Vol. V, p. 21.

solidarity ended at the Polish-Soviet border. Bolshevism presented a serious danger to National Socialism. He asked Lipski how could anyone associate with a Soviet Russia which encouraged world revolution.<sup>14</sup>

The keynote of German policy toward Poland continued to be the warning of the Russian menace as the new year, 1936, began. In February, Reich Minister without Portfolio, Hans Frank, visited Warsaw. In a conversation with Count Jan Szembek, the Deputy Foreign Minister, on February 12, Frank stressed that Polish-German collaboration was the only way to an effective struggle against the nascent barbarism in the East. The Polish-German community, Frank told Szembek, comprised a solid and forceful mass of over one hundred million people.<sup>15</sup> Allusions to the necessity of a common stand against the Soviet danger had, by 1936, become the standard feature of almost every German-Polish conversation on the diplomatic level. This German campaign received unexpected support at the end of February from Juliusz Lukasiewicz, the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, who arrived in Warsaw with disconcerting news. Lukasiewicz, reporting recent large scale concentrations of Soviet troops along the Polish border, pointed out the increasing tendency of the Kremlin to shift its main attention from the Far East to the western frontiers of the Soviet Union. The Polish Ambassador also possessed information which clearly indicated the superiority, both numerical and technical, of the Red Army. Lukasiewicz counseled the Polish Government

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14. Polish White Book, p. 31.

15. Ibid.



to support Germany's southeastward expansion and forge closer ties with the Third Reich.<sup>16</sup> Poland was beginning to feel the discomfort her two big neighbors might bring her.

Germany soon treated the world to a display of her energy and newly found boldness. On Saturday, March 7, 1936, Adolf Hitler, Führer and Reich Chancellor, pulled the third of his rapidly famous "Saturday surprises," the remilitarization of the Rhineland, an action specifically forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles. In a speech delivered at noon to the Reichstag, Hitler brashly announced that German troops were already moving into their "future peacetime garrisons."<sup>17</sup> This "Saturday surprise," (Wilhelmstrasse officials joked that Hitler chose Saturday to spring his surprises because he knew that British diplomats took the weekend off in the country)<sup>18</sup> Hitler claimed, was determined by the French ratification, on February 27, of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance treaty. France had destroyed the assumptions of Locarno and Germany felt obligated to take compensatory action.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly before March 7, 1936, André François-Poncet, the French Ambassador in Berlin, had assured Jozef Lipski that any German violation of the Rhine Pact would effectively mean war. France, according to François-Poncet, would proclaim a general mobilization. The

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16. Budurowycz, pp. 83f.

17. Shirer, p. 401.

18. Ibid., p. 413.

19. A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (New York, 1965), p. 97.

French Ambassador insisted that his information was absolutely authorized and Lipski immediately informed Warsaw.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, on March 7, Beck summoned the French Ambassador in Warsaw, Léon Noël, and solemnly informed him that Poland stood ready to honor her commitment to France under the Franco-Polish treaty of mutual assistance.<sup>21</sup> Though Beck remained skeptical of any significant French action, he apparently did expect some sort of French military demonstration on the Rhine.<sup>22</sup> That demonstration never came. Hitler had again judged his adversary's will shrewdly.

The Fuhrer did not intend to upset the Polish German détente by his Rhineland maneuver, however. Consequently, in the Reichstag speech which proclaimed the remilitarization, he sought to reassure Poland of his good will. While admitting that he found it painful that the only outlet to the sea of a people of thirty five millions was situated on territory once belonging to the Reich, he said that it was impossible and unreasonable "to deny a State of such size as this any outlet to the sea at all."<sup>23</sup>

The remilitarization of the Rhineland proved a key step in the development of Hitler's strategy. Konstantin von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, indicated as much to the United States Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, on May 18, 1936. Von Neurath told Bullitt that German policy precluded any active involvement

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20. Jozef Lipski, Sprawy Miedzynarodowe, Vol. I, No. 2-3, 1947, p. 16.

21. Beck, p. 110.

22. Debicki, p. 103.

23. Polish White Book, p. 32.

in foreign affairs until "the Rhineland had been digested." The construction of fortifications on the French and Belgian frontiers would negate the ability of France to enter German territory at will and therefore directly change the situation of the central and eastern European countries. Von Neurath expected the development of "a new constellation."<sup>24</sup> Thus the Franco-Polish alliance lost more practical meaning.

Meanwhile the Western Powers' only response to the German action of March 7 was the convocation of the Council of the League of Nations in London. The Locarno powers endeavored to settle the question within their own small circle. The proposals drafted by the Western group were handed to Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador to London, before being presented to the Council. Beck's tender vanity was wounded by this procedure. He objected strenuously in a statement to the Council of the League on March 18. Whenever the Polish Foreign Minister found his pride pricked, he resorted to a higher hauteur. Moreover, Beck told the Council that the entry of the German military into the formerly demilitarized zone was a fait accompli which the Council could, at best, place on record. He left it to the signatories of the Rhineland Pact to judge the circumstances of the German action and determine their own response.<sup>25</sup>

As the tense spring of 1936 wore on, Hitler's and G<sup>o</sup>ring's assertions that Poland was menaced by the danger of Bolshevism equally

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24. Shirer, p. 406.

25. Budurowycz, p. 86.

with Germany, and that both countries might be forced to march together against the Soviets acquired greater plausibility. On March 23 bloody clashes occurred between police and striking workers in Krakow, Czestochowa, and Chrzanow. Disorders and street fighting flared in Lwow on April 14 and the May Day celebrations in Warsaw were characterized by an equally riotous atmosphere. The Polish Communist Party took credit for the unrest which was fanning the already rampant anti-Soviet sentiment in Poland.<sup>26</sup>

On July 1, 1936, Wacław Grzybowski, formerly the Polish Ambassador to Prague, replaced Łukasiewicz at Moscow. Grzybowski's reports soon reinforced Łukasiewicz' impressions of the Soviet Union. In the Polish Ambassador's opinion, the ideas expounded by the Soviet leaders expressed Moscow's tendency toward expansion. Russia's "doctrinal imperialism" would eventually assume the form of aggression against Poland. Grzybowski's warnings and Germany's continual advances began to effect a change in the Polish Foreign Ministry's thinking. Even Count Szembek, always skeptical of the intentions of the Nazi regime, prepared a memorandum in July which urged Beck to jettison the policy of equilibrium between Germany and Russia and to harmonize the views of Warsaw and Berlin in regard to the Soviet problem.<sup>27</sup> Beck disregarded the memorandum, however. His attitude was supported by the new Inspector General of the Polish Army, Edward Smigly-Rydz, who did not harbor any illusions about

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26. Ibid., p. 88.

27. Ibid., pp. 88ff.

the real nature of the Hitler government.<sup>28</sup>

Yet before German propaganda and diplomacy could capitalize on the uncertainty and doubt in the Polish Foreign Office, Danzig once again shifted the focus of attention of Polish-German affairs. Poland became alarmed when the Free City's Nazi Party attempted to crush its opposition and "co-ordinate" the city government. The League High Commissioner in Danzig, Sean Lester, submitted a report to the July, 1936, session of the Council. The report alleged that the Danzig administration had violated the Free City's Constitution and had practiced open discrimination against the Jewish community. Lester complained further that during a three day visit of the German cruiser Leipzig in the port of Danzig, her captain had failed to pay him the usual courtesy call, reportedly on orders from Berlin. After Arthur Greiser, the President of the Danzig Senate, behaved rudely and aggressively in Geneva, the League Council virtually turned the whole matter over to Poland, a step which meant effective abdication of the League's responsibility as the guarantor of Danzig's status.<sup>29</sup> A tentative compromise was reached by Lipski in Berlin, who negotiated an exchange of notes between Germany and Poland, which mutually disclaimed any intention of violating Danzig's statute or Poland's rights in the Free City. The League Council took note of the compromise during its September session, though the agreement had the ultimate effect of reducing the League High Com-

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28. Ibid.

29. Dwight Lee, Ten Years, (Boston, 1942), p. 221.

missioner's position to that of a figurehead.<sup>30</sup>

In the summer of 1936, General Smigly-Rydz had been invited to participate in the French Army's maneuvers and to exchange military information. In keeping with his policy of balance, Beck dispatched the Deputy Minister in the Foreign Office, Count Jan Szembek, to Berlin ostensibly to represent Poland at the Olympic Games. Beck's real purpose, however, was to allay any German suspicions about the Franco-Polish military talks and to hasten the subsequent compromise over Danzig.<sup>31</sup> Szembek met with Hitler on August 12 and was assured by the Chancellor that under no circumstances would Poland's rights in Danzig be violated or the Free City's statute overthrown.<sup>32</sup> Two days later, von Ribbentrop repeated Hitler's assurances in regard to Danzig, stressing that such disagreements should not influence in any way the continuation of a common line in foreign policy on the part of both governments. Von Ribbentrop, pointing once again to the Soviet danger, underscored Hitler's refusal to countenance any compromise with Russia and urged active collaboration in foreign policy matters on Szembek.<sup>33</sup>

On August 30, 1936, Smigly-Rydz arrived in Paris. By September 3, he negotiated the Rambouillet Agreement, which granted Poland a loan of two billion francs. Though this financial help eventually proved to mean little owing to the subsequent devaluation of the

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30. Debicki, p. 110.

31. Debicki, p. 109.

32. Polish White Book, p. 33.

33. Grigore Gafencu, Last Days of Europe (New Haven, 1948), p. 35.

franc, it signified an improvement in the atmosphere of the Franco-Polish Alliance, which had been steadily deteriorating for some time.<sup>34</sup> And Smigly-Rydz received the Marshal's baton for his efforts.

The Rambouillet Agreement did little to ease the uncomfortable position of Poland between her two disagreeable neighbors. As their military power grew, the republic's role in east European politics became more precarious. In the wake of the German remilitarization of the Rhineland and the rapidity of German rearmament Russia flaunted her armed might in a series of vast military maneuvers in the autumn of 1936. The Soviets reserved their greatest assemblage of elite troops, and armored and mechanized units for a display of power on the Polish frontier. The Polish government waited for future developments nervously. Poland was already strapped economically and could not increase her average annual pre-war military expenditure of 768 million zlotys. Between 1934 and 1936, the Russians expanded their military budget by 5 billion rubles per year.<sup>35</sup> Any talk of Poland as a "great Power" was, by the fall of 1936, more than a myth.

On November 18, the German Ambassador in Warsaw, Hans Adolf von Moltke, called upon Beck to complain of the deterioration in Polish-German relations as a result of Polish press agitation, as well as the supposedly severe treatment of the German minority in Poland. Von Moltke also advised Beck that Hitler wished to avoid touching issues of principle in the Danzig question so as not to open a deli-

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34. Roos, pp. 121f.

35. Budurowycz, p. 92.

cate problem. He closed the conversation by declaring that both Hitler and von Ribbentrop had instructed him to stress that the principles and factors which had led to the Pact of 1934 still held their full meaning.<sup>36</sup>

The content of von Moltke's audience with Beck was, in the light of subsequent events, the first hint that the Nazi Government had begun to crystallize a design for further conquest. In a secret speech delivered to industrialists and high officials in Berlin on December 17, 1936, Hermann Göring, who had taken direction of the Four Year Plan in September, bluntly stated that war was coming. "We live," said Göring, "in a time when the final battle is in sight. We are already on the threshold of mobilization and we are already at war. All that is lacking is the actual shooting."<sup>37</sup>

Though the prospect of war might already be more than simply a contemplative exercise, it suited Hitler to continue to captivate the Poles. On January 11, 1937, when Lipski called to convey New Years greetings, the Führer expressed his conviction that the Danzig affair would be settled amicably. The growth of National Socialism in Danzig would guarantee that city's good relations with Poland. Once gain, Hitler pointed to the Nonaggression Pact of 1934 as the basis of the peace in Europe.<sup>38</sup>

When the Führer addressed the Reichstag on January 30, 1937, there seemed to be no end to the good will. Although he withdrew

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36. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 17.

37. Quoted in Shirer, p. 412.

38. Polish White Book, pp. 35f.



Germany's signature from the Versailles Treaty, long considered dead by the more sophisticated European statesmen, he proclaimed that there was no greater good for Europe than peace. National Socialist Germany could not conceive of entering into any arrangement with Bolshevism. He, the Führer, recognized that the Polish nation and the Polish state had become a reality and urged his countrymen to share his enlightened view.<sup>39</sup>

The campaign to convince the world, and Poland, of the peaceful intentions of German foreign policy continued into February. Göring, a frequent visitor to Poland, went again to Warsaw on February 16. There he talked with Smigly-Rydz in the presence of both Szembek and von Moltke. The Field Marshal reiterated Hitler's determination to follow a policy of rapprochement with Poland. He assured the Poles that Germany was satisfied with her present territorial status and coveted no Polish territory. Göring went so far as to disclaim any desire for the "Corridor." "We do not want the 'Corridor.' I say that sincerely and categorically we do not need the Corridor."<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the Germans were switching tactics by eschewing any desire for the "Corridor." Germany needed a strong Poland, with an easy access to the sea, if "the Russian avalanche" were not to strike against the German frontier. The danger to Poland and the rest of the world existed not only in the form of a Communist Russia, but in Russia herself, whether Soviet, liberal, or tsarist. Next, Göring seized upon the favorite Polish view of

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39. Ibid., p. 36.

40. Ibid., p. 37.

their place in the world, the idea of Poland's "independent" policy, intimating, correctly, that the measure of independence varied with Germany's disposition toward Poland. His subsequent proposition, that the best method of achieving an independent policy meant close collaboration in foreign affairs, was questionable. And Pilsudski's heirs, though failing to recognize the validity of Göring's first observation about "independence," questioned his second assertion and politely declined to align their policy with that of the Third Reich.

As German rearmament continued and the war economy began to develop, the necessity of devising operational plans became manifest. On June 24, 1937, Field Marshal von Blomberg drafted a directive marked "Top Secret," of which only four copies were made, a copy being distributed to each commander in chief of the armed forces.<sup>41</sup> The directive stressed the need for a constant preparedness for war and called for the military exploitation of all politically favorable opportunities. The German General Staff conceived two eventualities for war. In either event, the ensuing struggle was envisioned as a two-front war. Accordingly, the directive outlined two war plans: "Operation Red," which postulated a German attack in the West, and "Operation Green," a German move against Czechoslovakia and the Southeast. In both operations, it was believed Poland would remain neutral, so that troops could be transferred from East Prussia to the front. Von Blomberg urged that the political leaders take all necessary steps to insure Poland's neu-

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41. Shirer, p. 416.

trality.<sup>42</sup>

The expiration date of the Geneva Convention on Upper Silesia fell due on July 15, 1937. Several months earlier, the German Government approached Poland with a proposal to replace the minorities' protection clause of the Convention with a new bilateral agreement. The Wilhelmstrasse advocated a treaty that would cover the German minority in all of Poland, rather than strictly Upper Silesia, and likewise the Polish minority in Germany. Beck had always resented interference by external parties in Poland's minority problems. His declaration to the League of Nations in 1934 specifically denied the right of the League to concern itself with minority affairs in Poland and had created a notable stir. Beck's response to this German offer was characteristic: dilatory and evasive.<sup>43</sup>

Partly to turn Germany's attention from the minorities question, Beck summoned Ambassador von Moltke on July 30 and August 13 to propose, on each occasion, that both governments issue declarations that they would respect the Danzig Statute. On September 6, von Moltke told Beck that he had been authorized by Hitler to emphasize that Germany regarded the Danzig Statute as a reality and did not intend to challenge it. Hitler would not, however, consider a public declaration.<sup>44</sup> Lipski, fearing that the Germans had misconstrued the Polish proposal as a unilateral German declaration, saw von Neurath on September 11, and stressed the bilateral nature of Beck's sug-

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42. Robertson, pp. 90ff.

43. Debicki, pp. 111f.

44. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 1.

gestion. Lipski further indicated that the declaration could take the form of an exchange of notes which did not require publication. He presented von Neurath with a draft declaration.<sup>45</sup> On the pretext of being in possession of fresh instructions from Beck, Lipski approached G<sup>o</sup>ring on October 1 and requested him to use his influence to convince Hitler and von Neurath to agree to the joint declaration. Reportedly, G<sup>o</sup>ring saw no objection to the issuance of a Danzig declaration since it would contain what the F<sup>u</sup>hrer and he had expressed repeatedly. Yet Lipski's efforts produced no results. On October 6, von Moltke, as he had done exactly one month earlier, told Beck that Germany refused to consider any sort of declaration in regard to Danzig.<sup>46</sup>

German efforts to obtain a minorities declaration increased in intensity as the Poles in turn stepped up their campaign for a declaration on Danzig. Beck finally yielded to the pressure exerted by Berlin, perhaps in the hope that his concession might influence a similar response in regard to Danzig by the Germans. On October 18, 1937, Lipski met with von Neurath at the Wilhelmstrasse and suggested that the minorities agreement be put into the form of a reciprocal political declaration rather than a bilateral treaty. Beck shied away from conventions which had legal force. Parallel unilateral declarations would not bind Poland as firmly.<sup>47</sup> Lipski also proposed that a delegation from the respective minority in each country be received on the same day by Hitler and President Moscicki. Von Neurath

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45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., pp. 11 ff.

47. Beck, p. 130.

agreed. He then dropped a bombshell. The German Foreign Minister told the Polish Ambassador that ultimately the Danzig question would have to be solved since it would permanently disturb Polish-German relations. He emphasized that a settlement was not urgent at that time, but the only tenable settlement he envisioned involved the restoration of Danzig to the Reich. In that event, Poland's economic interests would be protected. Lipski, greatly agitated, hardly found much solace in von Neurath's assurances that the question was not of immediate, but more distant, concern.<sup>48</sup>

Both sides scheduled the mutual Minorities Declaration for November 5, 1937, a day which would prove momentous indeed. On November 4, Szembek met with Göring in Berlin. The Field Marshal expressed the hope that positive results in Polish-German relations would ensue from the Minorities Declarations. He repeated the familiar line that Germany considered Poland's territorial integrity inviolable. Szembek, somewhat uneasy about Lipski's disturbing conversation with von Neurath, pressed Göring about the German attitude toward Danzig and the activities of Albert Forster, Nazi Gauleiter in the Free City. Göring assured Szembek that the Reich entertained absolutely no intentions of interfering with Polish rights in Danzig and declared with all his authority that nothing would happen against Polish interests there. He maintained that Germany's concerns lay elsewhere. Moreover, Forster had recently been called to Berlin and instructed to quiet his pronouncements as well as scrupulously to respect Polish rights in Danzig.<sup>49</sup>

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48. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 19.

49. Polish White Book, pp. 38 f.

The following day, November 5, Hitler met a delegation, escorted by Lipski, of the Polish minority in Germany. Moscicki performed a similar function in Warsaw. In a conversation with Lipski after the ceremony, the Führer, responding to the Ambassador's expressed hope of obtaining a general understanding on Danzig, defined his attitude with some precision. He stated categorically that there would be no changes in the legal or political position of Danzig, that the rights of the indigenous Polish population would be respected, and that Poland's rights in regard to the Free City would not be impaired. Hitler told the Polish Ambassador that he considered the Pact of 1934 as referent to Danzig also, twice remarking emphatically: "Danzig ist mit Polen verbunden!" Danzig is bound up with Poland.<sup>50</sup>

The identical declaration issued simultaneously by the Polish and German Governments granted to the respective minorities the free use of the mother tongue, the right to unite in cultural and economic associations, and the right to establish and maintain schools and churches where the mother tongue was used. It specifically prohibited attempts by either government to assimilate a minority or exert pressure on younger members to renounce their ethnic grouping. Job discrimination as a result of minority association was also disavowed.<sup>51</sup>

The day's events had not yet ended, however. Having received the Polish delegation and conversed with Lipski, Hitler proceeded to the Reich Chancellery for a meeting of a different nature and intent. At quarter past four in the afternoon, Field Marshal von Blomberg,

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50. Ibid., pp. 41 f.

51. Ibid., p. 40.

the War Minister, Colonel General von Fritsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht, Admiral Raeder, Commander of the German Navy, and Field Marshal Goring, Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe assembled to hear Hitler's exposition on the aims of German policy. The session lasted until eight thirty in the evening and Hitler's military adjutant, Colonel Hossbach, recorded what transpired. The Führer's taste for the dramatic surfaced early in the meeting as he asked that in the interest of a long-term German policy his remarks be regarded, in the event of an unexpected demise, as his last will and testament.

Germany needed living space if the German racial community were to prosper, droned Hitler. The German people had a greater right to an enlarged living space than other peoples. That living space could only be found on the European continent and not in the exploitation of colonies, after the manner of the earlier capitalists. The rapid development of the German Reich in the center of Europe once again irritated the two traditional antagonists, Britain and France. In view of this antagonism, Germany could solve her problems only by resorting to the use of force. Given the resort to force, with its attendant risks, as axiomatic, two simple questions remained to be answered: 'When' and 'How.' And, indeed, the Führer envisioned three possible answers.

Since Germany's relative strength would decrease as the rest of the world joined the heated armaments race, she was obliged to strike while the others were still preparing an effective deterrent. Hitler had resolved to extend significantly Germany's living space

by 1943 to 1945. The Reich would act before 1943 only in the event that France's domestic complications might render her army incapable of action against Germany or that France became embroiled in a war with another state. In either case, Germany would attack and overthrow the Czech state first. The destruction of Czechoslovakia would lead to the formation of a common German-Hungarian frontier, a development which would assure Polish neutrality in a Franco-German conflict. Yet Germany's strength had to be maintained, for a German setback would encourage a Polish action against East Prussia, Pomerania or Silesia.<sup>52</sup> For the second time, a potential German war plan expected and depended on Polish neutrality.

As Hitler rambled on, his audience sat in stunned disbelief. Their shock derived not from any moral or humanitarian concern but rather from lack of confidence in the practicability of the Führer's proposals. The provocation of a major war, they objected, would mean disaster, for Germany was not ready for a general conflict. Von Blomberg, von Fritsch, and von Neurath somehow found it within themselves to dare question the Führer's logic and program.<sup>53</sup> Within three months, all three had been replaced.

The "Hossbach Memorandum" is as sensational as it is remarkable. It testifies clearly to Hitler's ruthlessness and perhaps his lunacy. But, given the context in which the meeting was held, it seems hardly a master blueprint of carefully and cogently planned aggression. The

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52. United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Washington, 1949), Series D, Vol. I, pp. 29 ff.

53. Shirer, p. 422.



conference can be more readily interpreted as significant in terms of a domestic maneuver. Only Göring was an incorrigible Nazi, the others were conservative establishment types whom Hitler mistrusted. Dr. Schacht, moreover, had challenged the continued expansion of the armament program. By giving his military chiefs more concern about the "low" level of German armament, Hitler could bring effective pressure on Schacht and subsequently oust him. Furthermore, Hitler's speculations suffered from a disturbing unrelatedness to reality. Internal revolution in France or a French conflict with a power other than Germany were not in the realm of possibility.<sup>54</sup> Still, the Führer's speculations about war did not bode well for the future of Europe.

On November 6, 1937, Mussolini's Italy joined the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Agreement. Beck, ever vigilant to maintain the independence of Polish policy, uncomfortably expected that Poland might be invited to accede to this tripartite declaration. To prevent a possible embarrassment and to quash current rumors that Poland would associate herself with an anti-Soviet coalition, the Polish Foreign Minister, on November 9, instructed all Polish diplomatic missions to inform their hosts that Poland had no such intentions. Poland had not received and would not accept an invitation to sign the three-power protocol because of her special position as a neighbor of the U.S.S.R. and her objection in principle to the formation of any bloc. Moreover, the Poles no longer considered the Russian threat to be immediate. For the recent purges of the Red Army had left the troops garrisoning the Polish frontier without officers capable,

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54. Taylor, pp. 129 ff.

so Beck and Smigly-Rydz thought, of undertaking offensive operations.<sup>55</sup>

Dr. Goebbels, the Reich's chief manufacturer of propaganda, had planned to usher the new year in with a series of some one hundred fifty pro-Danzig demonstrations throughout Germany. The Poles feared that such a wave of meetings would trigger counter popular reactions in Poland and poison the friendly atmosphere of Polish-German relations. Consequently, Prince Lubomirski, the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin called on fellow nobility in the person of Prince von Bismarck, the Deputy Director of the Wilhelmstrasse's Political Department, to request the abandonment of the planned demonstrations. Von Bismarck telephoned Lubomirski later that evening to tell him that Minister Goebbels had ordered the cancellation of the Danzig demonstrations.<sup>56</sup> The Poles were gratified by this display of magnanimity. The prospects for the new year seemed none too bleak.

At the turn of 1937 into 1938, Beck observed that Europe's diplomatic leadership had undergone a transformation. Paris submitted the effective management of its foreign policy to London. The rise of the Rome-Berlin axis created an opposing power center, governed principally from Berlin. Beck did not expect any energetic political stirrings to emanate from London, but he cast a wary eye towards Berlin and Rome. Accordingly, he took the opportunity, on his return trip from Geneva in January, to call in the German capital.<sup>57</sup> He met with von Neurath on January 13 and discussed the rapidly deteriora-

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55. Budurowycz, p. 104.

56. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 28.

57. Beck, pp. 139 f.

ting position of the League High Commissioner in Danzig. Both men agreed, however, that the question could be postponed. The Polish Foreign Minister also told his German counterpart that Polish-Czechoslovakian relations bordered on chaos and that he could see no prospect of early improvement.<sup>58</sup>

On January 14, Beck met with Hitler, at the latter's request. The Führer emphasized that the happy development of Polish-German affairs loomed as the only positive factor in the present inflamed international situation. He repeated the declarations regarding Danzig he had made to Lipski on November 5, 1937, and swore to Beck that he felt bound by his words. Poland's rights and Danzig's status would never be violated by the Reich.<sup>59</sup> Hitler then voiced his concern about Austria and the Sudetenland population. His denunciations of the Habsburgs bordered on pathological hatred and he was particularly annoyed at some supposedly anti-German activities of the ex-Empress Zita. Beck came away with the definite feeling that the problems of Austria and the Sudetenland were edging toward a climax.<sup>60</sup>

Hitler's first foreign policy pronouncement after the dismissal of von Neurath on February 4 came in a speech to the Reichstag on February 20. It was all favorable to Poland. The Führer singled out the Nonaggression Pact of 1934 for praise and declared its existence attributable to Pilsudski, who was after all no Western

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58. DGFP, pp. 35 f.

59. Polish White Book, p. 43.

60. Beck, p. 141.

parliamentarian but a strong personality.<sup>61</sup> Both Germany and Danzig respected Polish rights and both hoped to transform their relationships with Poland into sincere and friendly collaboration.<sup>62</sup>

Göring, who did not seem to tire of attempting to seduce Poland into an anti-Soviet alliance, came to Warsaw once again on February 23. After reaffirming Hitler's previous assurances about Danzig, he observed that, in view of the Red Army's present pitiful condition, a joint effort could inflict a substantial military defeat on the Soviets. At any rate, since the Soviet Union posed a permanent and serious danger, Poland and Germany ought to harmonize their interests. Szembek and Smigly-Rydz responded coolly.<sup>63</sup>

On March 13, 1938, the Führer and Reich Chancellor disposed of the Austrian problem by arriving in Vienna and proclaiming the Anschluss. That night at eleven o'clock Ambassador von Moltke discussed the day's events with Count Szembek who assured him that both President Moscicki and Marshal Smigly-Rydz were observing the situation in Austria with complete calm. Poland regarded the Anschluss as an internal German affair and assumed that her economic interests there would not be prejudiced.<sup>64</sup> Beck, who was returning from a visit to Rome, passed through Vienna and was received with great ceremony by the new Staatthalter of Austria, Arthur Seyss-Inquart.<sup>65</sup>

Yet Anschluss gave Beck a chance to engage in a bit of pressure diplomacy himself. For Poland took the opportunity of Hitler's

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61. Polish White Book, p. 44.

62. Gafencu, p. 36.

63. Polish White Book, p. 45.

64. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 41.

65. Beck, p. 145.

coup to settle accounts with Lithuania. Since the Polish seizure of Vilna in 1920 there had been no diplomatic or consular relations between Poland and Lithuania and the frontier between the two countries had been closed. Lithuania refused to deal with Poland as long as Vilna, designated in the Lithuanian Constitution as the capital, remained in Polish hands. On March 11, 1938, Lithuanian border guards shot and killed a Polish soldier. When Beck returned to Warsaw on March 17, he issued a forty-eight hour ultimatum requiring that Lithuania agree to re-establish normal diplomatic relations. The Lithuanians yielded to the Polish demand. On March 13, for the first time since World War I, the independence of a whole European country had been violated with impunity. Beck felt emboldened to take recourse to the methods of coercive diplomacy. He had come to the conclusion that a passive attitude in the face of German expansion was both inadvisable and dangerous.<sup>66</sup> Germany applauded the Polish action, crowing that it demonstrated the impotence of Russia, supposedly the friend of Lithuania and the League.<sup>67</sup> The Anschluss and the Lithuanian affair revealed the bankruptcy of the collective security system. On March 19, Beck himself frankly told newspaper reporters that the League of Nations was dead and that Poland had returned to the "old" diplomacy.<sup>68</sup>

Since all indications suggested that the Polish-German detente was proceeding smoothly, Lipski called on Joachim von Ribbentrop,

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66. Budurowycz, p. 109.

67. Lee, p. 304.

68. Ibid.

the new German Foreign Minister, on March 31 to propose the extension for ten years of the Nonaggression Pact. Such an extension, argued Lipski, would silence those who regarded the Pact of 1934 as merely a temporary, transitional stage in Polish-German relations. Von Ribbentrop agreed to consider the idea.<sup>69</sup>

The reciprocal Minorities Declaration of November 5, 1937, did not still German efforts to mobilize and organize persons of German stock who lived outside the Reich. When Hitler assumed power, he had ordered the establishment of a special department to deal with minority affairs, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle. Constituted under the aegis of the SS, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle performed its functions zealously. On May 20, it informed the Foreign Ministry that it planned to unify by order from Berlin all German political, economic, and cultural organizations in Poland into a single organization. The Foreign Ministry objected strenuously on the grounds that Berlin's role in this "spontaneous" unification of Germans in Poland could not be kept secret, that the moment was ill-chosen for inflaming Polish-German relations, and that Poland's reaction might injure the position of the German minority. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, grudgingly, made a few trifling concessions to the Foreign Ministry. The proposal transmitted to German leaders in Poland on May 28 remained substantively the same. However, the plan met serious opposition in Poland and the rejection of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle proposal by the leaders of the German minority avoided an exacerbation of Polish-German relations.<sup>70</sup>

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69. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 45.

70. Ibid., p. 51.

On May 25, Gauleiter Forster of Danzig visited Warsaw and, in an audience with Beck, informed the Polish Foreign Minister that the 1939 elections to the Danzig Volkstag would be in the form of a plebiscite on a current question. Forster also spoke of the contemplated change in the flag of Danzig. The Free City's Nazi Party intended to add a swastika or introduce the swastika flag. Beck reacted calmly, but cautioned Forster that repercussions might arise if the flag were changed.<sup>71</sup>

Forster had actively campaigned in Poland for the adoption of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle's unification proposal of May 20. On May 31, Forster was summoned to Berlin, where von Ribbentrop dressed him down at the Wilhelmstrasse. The Foreign Minister told the enthusiastic Gauleiter that he did not consider his participation in questions of the German minority in Poland advisable, since this would only make his position in Danzig more difficult. Von Ribbentrop demanded that he disassociate himself with such matters. Forster grudgingly agreed. He also agreed, at the Foreign Minister's request, to postpone any changes in the city's flag and delay the introduction of racial laws there.<sup>72</sup>

The minorities question had by no means died out. On July 9, Ambassador von Moltke took the issue up with Minister Beck. Although he did not advocate any signed agreement, von Moltke suggested that the responsible department heads of the two Ministries of Interior, assisted by an official from each of the Foreign Ministries, meet

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71. Ibid., p. 47.

72. Ibid., p. 51.

periodically in conference to examine frankly the various minorities problems. Beck, typically, declined to give the German Ambassador a definitive answer by pleading that the matter exceeded the scope of his Ministry. He would, of course, refer it to the proper department.<sup>73</sup> Minorities problems, Beck had always felt, were matters of internal concern. The injection of such questions into bilateral or multilateral international discussion never ceased to annoy him. His favorite method of avoiding or postponing unpleasant business was to ignore it. Consequently, he left for a vacation a few days after his conversation with von Moltke. On July 19, Count Lubienski, the Head of Cabinet of the Polish Foreign Ministry, summoned Johann von Wühlisch, the German Chargé in Warsaw, to communicate the following answer to von Moltke's proposal. It was a masterpiece of Beckian prose: "The Polish Government does not decline in principle Herr von Moltke's proposal that contact should be established between representatives of the home administrations of both countries." Lubienski talked vaguely of discussions in autumn and von Wühlisch left confused.<sup>74</sup> As the summer came to a close the Führer and the world's attention turned to the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. Beck's ploy had worked, for the time being.

On August 10, G<sup>o</sup>ring observed during a conversation with Ambassador Lipski that the Russian project he had suggested to Szembek and Smigly-Rydz on February 23 would "acquire actuality" after a settlement of the Czech problem. The commander of the Luftwaffe

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73. Ibid., pp. 63f.

74. German White Book, p. 176.



also intimated that upon examination, Poland might find she had certain direct interests in Russia, for example, the Ukraine.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, relations between Poland and Germany had already begun to deteriorate. Beck's hard won and tenderly maintained dé-tente was showing signs of strain. In a dispatch of September 2, 1938, to the Wilhelmstrasse von Moltke complained that Polish public opinion toward Germany had definitely worsened. The German Ambassador advised his Foreign Office that Poles were now concerned with a "German danger." The disconcerting speed with which the Führer had accomplished Anschluss and the reopening of the Sudeten German question contributed to this uneasiness. Von Moltke took note of the parallelism in German aims in Czechoslovakia and Polish aspirations there. Yet his dispatch differentiates between the official government attitude and Polish popular opinion. The man in the street was alarmed by Germany's attempt to impose political demands on a neighboring state because of the existence of a German minority. Beck, however, sought to minimize the significance of the attacks on the Reich in a conversation with von Moltke on September 1. The Polish Government, its Foreign Minister insisted, would not be influenced in any way by the nervous state of public opinion, but would hold to its usual political course.<sup>76</sup>

Ambassador Lipski saw von Ribbentrop at the annual Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg. The Reich Foreign Minister, very evidently in rare good spirit, vowed to work positively for the development of

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75. Budurowycz, p. 133.

76. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, pp. 75ff.

Polish-German relations as long as his Führer maintained him in his present post. He spoke glowingly of the common interests linking both states, assuring Lipski that Hitler shared his views.<sup>77</sup> And, indeed, the Führer did. In a brutal and bombastic harangue against Czechoslovakia before a delirious mass of the Nazi faithful in the stadium at Nuremberg on the night of September 12, Hitler had sweet words for Poland. The Nonaggression Pact of 1934, negotiated by the great patriot and statesman, Marshal Pilsudski, mattered more to the preservation of European peace than the sum of all the inanities babbled at the temple of the League of Nations in Geneva.<sup>78</sup> Not unintentionally, Hitler was expressing the fundamental beliefs of the Polish leaders. Colonel Beck always and narcissistically fancied himself to be a realist. The Führer's praise of the Polish leaders for their realism flattered them. It reinforced their own conception of themselves. Poland's hard-headed realists prepared to pursue their pragmatic policy in the face of disconcerting, though instructive, events. Yet throughout the summer and fall of 1938, they would never be able to cast off the ominous shadow of Hitler.

Beck and his advisers saw the Czech crisis as a struggle between two axes, Rome-Berlin, and Paris-London. Poland would not adhere to either bloc. An overly positive attitude toward Czechoslovakia would destroy relations with Germany. National security

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77. Polish White Book, p. 46.

78. Gafencu, p. 32.

would dictate Polish policy.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Beck had determined to insist on compensation for any gains scored by Hitler, regardless whether his policy strengthened the Führer's hand.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the Polish Government's attitude toward Czechoslovakia had evolved and hardened over a period of time. Warsaw remembered the Czech seizure of the southern part of the frontier Duchy of Teschen, formerly in Austrian Silesia, while the Poles had been fighting the Bolsheviks. Despite the fact that the Polish population of Teschen greatly outnumbered the Czech, the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris, on July 28, 1920, awarded the area to Czechoslovakia. These memories blighted subsequent Polish-Czech relations. Each side bitterly distrusted the other's motives. When the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia ratified a mutual assistance pact in 1935, Polish vituperation was unrestrained. Warsaw looked upon the pact as confirmation that Communist anti-Polish activities were organized in Czechoslovakian territory.<sup>81</sup>

In May, 1938, Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, attempted to use the Franco-Polish alliance to convince Beck to make demands on Germany similar to those made by Britain and France. The Polish Foreign Minister refused. He politely reminded Bonnet that the Franco-Polish alliance was completely bilateral. Nothing in the treaty related to Czechoslovakia. Poland would not support Czechoslovakia while the Polish minority suffered brutal treatment

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79. Keith Eubank, Munich (Norman, 1963), p. 106.

80. Budurowycz, p. 118.

81. Debicki, p. 116.

at the hands of her government. In July, Beck admitted to the French Ambassador in Warsaw, Léon Noël, that the fate of Czechoslovakia left Poland cold. The Polish Foreign Minister insisted that he would not tolerate any discrimination in the treatment of the Polish and Sudeten minorities. He told British representatives that if Chamberlain's agent in Prague, Runciman, were to investigate the mistreatment claims of the Sudeten Germans, he ought to investigate Polish claims also.<sup>82</sup> As the summer waned into fall, and as Hitler's demands and accusations became more shrill, Beck stepped up his activity.

Late in the evening of September 15, Lipski rang up the State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, von Weizsäcker, at Berchtesgaden on specific instructions from Beck. The Polish Foreign Minister wished the Germans to know that, in the event of a solution of the Czech question by plebiscite, Poland would demand corresponding treatment for the Teschen region. In no case, would the Polish Government yield this demand. Similar démarches were made by Polish embassies in London, Paris, Rome, Belgrade, and Bucharest the next day.<sup>83</sup> Also on September 16, both Beck and Lipski were notified by the German Foreign Office that Hitler had met with Chamberlain the previous day at Obersalzberg where he told the British Prime Minister that he would no longer consider autonomy for the Sudeten Germans. Now he could tolerate cession of the region to Germany only. Though Chamberlain was consulting at the time with

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82. Eubank, p. 106f.

83. United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Washington, 1949), Series D, Vol. II, p. 819.

the British Cabinet and the Paris Government, the Wilhelmstrasse tipped the Poles that he had indicated personal approval of Hitler's latest demand.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, on September 17, Polish troops manned the Teschen frontiers.

On September 19, Britain and France proposed a cession, to the Reich, of the undoubtedly German territory of the Sudetenland without a plebiscite. The Poles requested, through diplomatic channels, a frontier revision without a plebiscite also.<sup>85</sup> The following day, September 20, Hitler revealed new plans to Lipski. He preferred to occupy the Sudetenland by force. In fact, he hoped his proposals would not be accepted so he could resort to armed action. If he were asked to guarantee the frontiers and freedom of the rump of Czechoslovakia, he would do so only if Poland and Hungary made similar guarantees and the Czechs met Polish demands. Finally, if Poland went to war with Czechoslovakia, Germany would back Poland.<sup>86</sup> With full knowledge of German support, on September 21, the Polish Government officially demanded from Czechoslovakia the same treatment Germany would receive. If Germany obtained land, Poland must have land. Teschen must be ceded. At the same time, Poland denounced the Polish-Czech treaty of 1925 relating to the treatment of Polish minorities in Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, the Polish troop concentrations on the Czech frontier led Dr. Kamil Krofta, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, to request that Moscow remind Warsaw

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84. Ibid., pp. 810ff.

85. Ibid., p. 849.

86. Eubank, p. 152.

that a Polish invasion of Czechoslovakia would invalidate the Russo-Polish Nonaggression Pact. On September 23, Potemkin, the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, accordingly informed the Polish Charge that if Polish troops crossed the Czech frontier, the Soviet Union would denounce the Nonaggression Pact. Beck's answer was terse: Poland would not explain measures taken for her own security, which were the exclusive concern of her own government, to anyone.<sup>87</sup> That evening the Polish Foreign Minister told von Moltke that he attached no special importance to the Soviet threat. It was merely a propaganda gesture.<sup>88</sup> To a certain extent, Germany relied on the knowledge that neither Polish policy nor Polish public opinion would tolerate the presence of Soviet troops on Polish soil. Consequently, the Wilhelmstrasse could safely doubt the credibility of Russian threats to aid Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, between September 23 and October 10, NKVD patrols allegedly fired on Polish troops and peasants along the Polish-Soviet border. Warsaw, though confident that the Russians would not act, hastened to seek reassurance of German support. That backing came on October 1, when Göring promised Lipski that Poland could count on effective help from Germany in the event of involvement with Russia.<sup>89</sup>

Tension in Europe continued to increase. War over Czechoslovakia seemed imminent. On September 26, President Beneš of Czechoslovakia asked Polish President Moscicki to accept the principle of

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87. Ibid., p. 186.

88. DGFP, Series D, Vol. II, p. 922.

89. Budurowycz, pp. 124f.

rectification of the frontiers through the usual channels without any foreign interference. In a follow-up note, Krofta proposed negotiations to reach an understanding. Britain and France immediately fell in behind the Czech proposals, hinting that if Poland guaranteed her benevolent neutrality, Czechoslovakia might agree to cede Teschen.<sup>90</sup> Beck, who by now was beginning to enjoy the rôle of a statesman of great power, refused. On the evening of the 26th, Hitler addressed a jammed Sportpalast in Berlin. In a paroxysm of rage, the Führer flung insults and threats at Czechoslovakia. Yet Poland escaped his fury. Referring once again to the familiar theme of the 1934 Nonaggression Pact's pacific influence, Hitler vowed that Poland and Germany would live together. He could not deny thirty-three million people an outlet to the sea. He would seek to extend the limits of the Polish-German understanding.<sup>91</sup> In the wake of Hitler's friendly remarks, Warsaw presented the following demands to Prague on September 27: 1.) a separation of purely Polish areas from Czechoslovakia, and 2.) free exercise of the right of self determination for the Polish minority in the rump territory.<sup>92</sup> Later that day, von Weizsäcker showed to Lipski a line of demarcation which Polish and German troops ought to observe in the event of hostilities. The line had been drawn on a map prepared by the Headquarters of the Wehrmacht. Von Weizsäcker also suggested that the Polish Military Attaché meet with the proper

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90. Eubank, p. 185.

91. Polish White Book, p. 46.

92. DGFP, Series D, Vol. II, p. 970.

German military authorities to discuss a delimitation of spheres of interest. Both agreed to further consultations.<sup>93</sup> On September 28, Beck told von Moltke that he fervently hoped Polish and German interests in Czechoslovakia would not conflict. Earlier, he had dispatched all relevant documents by airplane to Lipski so that the Ambassador could formulate all Polish territorial claims in detail.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, the final claims would be formulated in Berlin. Lipski met von Weizsäcker again September 29. No material differences existed between the lines of demarcation indicated on the German and Polish maps. Together Lipski and von Weizsäcker adjusted the minor discrepancies.<sup>95</sup>

Yet, just when Polish-German cooperation seemed to be running most smoothly, Colonel Beck received a rude surprise. The news that a conference had been called at Munich for September 30 stunned the Polish Foreign Minister. The obvious failure to invite or consult Poland wounded his vanity. Britain, France, Germany, and Italy had treated Poland as a small power. His own rationalization that the Munich Conference "disregarded the most elementary principles of respect for state sovereignty and the inviolability of its territory"<sup>96</sup> provided him with a stimulus for action. Since Poland had not been considered at Munich, Poland would implement the Munich decisions on her own. On the evening of September 30, Beck dis-

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93. Ibid., p. 975.

94. Ibid., pp. 982f.

95. Ibid., pp. 997f.

96. Beck, p. 160.



patched an ultimatum to Prague demanding the evacuation of the Teschen area by noon of October 1. A British mediation proposal was summarily rejected and the Czechs capitulated.<sup>97</sup> And as the occupation of Teschen began, the apparent success of the Polish victory clouded its implications for the future. The jackal would yet be devoured by the wolf.

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97. Eubank, p. 225.

III: Oct. 1, 1938 to Sept. 1, 1939

"In a war of ideas it is people who get killed."

With the Munich Agreement, the Western Powers managed to paper over, for the time being, the fundamental confrontation of principles which the world would soon witness. The fateful year 1939 would demonstrate that Munich was merely a staying action, a ruse convenient to both sides. Meanwhile Europe cheered. Neville Chamberlain came home to exultant crowds in London. The Führer, surprised that it had all been so easy, could hardly mask his joy. Beck, blindly, considered his policy a success. Only Edouard Daladier conceived of what the future might have in store. Turning to General Gamelin and referring to the cheering crowd at Le Bourget Field, Daladier said, "Idiots! They do not know what they applaud."<sup>1</sup>

The Poles also did not know what they were applauding. Certainly, on October 1, 1938, Warsaw failed to see Poland's own plight. For at ten o'clock in the morning the Czech Government unconditionally accepted Polish demands in regard to Teschen. Military experts of both states met at the Czech-Polish frontier that afternoon to settle proceedings for the occupation and evacuation of the Teschen territory which was to begin at noon of October 2.<sup>2</sup> As the occupation was effected, Ambassador Lipski, State Secretary von Weizsäcker, and Under State Secretary Ernst Woermann met a number of times to discuss a disputed portion of the Czech cession. Both Poland and Germany claimed an important railway station at Oderburg. The Reich, in addition demanded certain canal and transit rights.

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1. Eubank, p. 274.

2. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, pp. 81 f.

Finally on October 5, Hitler himself decided to relinquish German claims to the railway station when Poland agreed to grant the other concessions demanded by the Wilhelmstrasse.<sup>3</sup> Poland's rôle at Munich had come to an end.

Yet Poland's actions indicated a curious application of balance of power theory, if not a general misunderstanding of Poland's position. Under the classical theory, a state attempting to maintain its own independence between two more powerful states would move closer to the less aggressive. However, Beck's foreign policy contradicted the theory. Whenever Germany took an aggressive action, Poland responded with an act perhaps half as aggressive.<sup>4</sup> In the Munich crisis, Poland cast her lot with the aggressive Germany and repudiated the momentarily more benign Soviet Union. Admittedly, a choice between Germany and Russia was akin to a choice between Scylla and Charybdis. Yet Beck's conception of his "policy of equilibrium" clearly envisioned the necessity for skillfully tiptoeing between the two powers. During the Munich crisis, Beck slipped and fell; the "policy of Equilibrium" would never again be restored.

By the middle of October, 1938, Slovakia and the Carpatho-Ukraine were granted autonomy within the framework of the new Czechoslovakia. The Ukrainian minority in Poland numbered a vociferous six million and the Polish Government feared a wave of nationalistic agitation in its own province of Eastern Galicia. Consequently, the Poles stubbornly demanded that the Carpatho-Ukraine, a nest of

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3. Ibid., pp. 81 ff.

4. Roberts, p. 599.

Ukrainian nationalist activity, come under the domination of Hungary, Poland's good friend in East Central Europe. As the autumn passed on, Poland and Hungary continued to make remonstrances, particularly in Rome. The Italians had come to play a middleman in the dispute and had proposed to von Ribbentrop arbitration of the German, Polish, and Hungarian claims.<sup>5</sup> The German Foreign Office refused for the Wilhelmstrasse considered the Carpatho-Ukraine and Slovakia as future bargaining counters with Poland. On October 4, 1938, Göring anticipated a dispute over these areas and suggested to von Weizsäcker that an exchange could be concluded with Poland over Danzig. On October 18, Lipski called on von Weizsäcker to inform him that Beck intended to remain in friendly consultation with Germany in regard to the Hungarian-Slovak question. In a memorandum for von Ribbentrop on October 22, von Weizsäcker suggested that a common Polish-Hungarian frontier in the Carpathians could serve as compensation for Danzig and Memel.<sup>6</sup> Von Ribbentrop made use of his State Secretary's idea two days later.

In a conversation with Ambassador Lipski over luncheon at the Grand Hotel in Berchtesgaden on October 24, the German Foreign Minister proposed a general settlement of issues, Gesamtlösung, between Germany and Poland. Gesamtlösung included the reunion of Danzig with the Reich while Poland would be assured the retention of railway and economic facilities there. In addition, Poland would agree to the

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5. Count Galeazzo Ciano di Cortellazzo, Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938 (New York, 1953), pp. 173 ff.

6. Robertson, p. 154.

construction of an extra-territorial Reichsautobahn and railway line across the "Corridor." As compensation, von Ribbentrop mentioned the possibility of extending the Polish-German Nonaggression Pact by twenty-five years and a German guarantee of Polish-German frontiers. The German Foreign Minister's emphasis lay on joint Polish-German action in colonial matters, the emigration of Jews, and in developing a common Russian policy on the basis of the Anti-Comintern Pact. If the Polish Government agreed to this German conception, the question of the Carpatho-Ukraine could be solved in accordance with Poland's attitude toward the matter. In parting, von Ribbentrop told Lipski that he hoped to discuss his proposals with the Polish Foreign Minister.<sup>7</sup>

Von Ribbentrop, at the least, ruined Lipski's luncheon. Visibly agitated, the Polish Ambassador left hurriedly to communicate the sense of his conversation to Colonel Beck. Beck was surprised, but as he told Grigore Gafencu, the Rumanian Foreign Minister, some six months later, he did not lose his temper, though he observed that he had every right to be furious.<sup>8</sup> As Jozef Beck prepared to make a reply to his counterpart in Berlin, the Nazi regime launched its program of harassment with a bizarre provocation.

On October 6, the Polish Government had issued a decree, published on October 15, directing that all passports bear a control stamp in order to remain valid. Passports not so stamped would no longer authorize entry into Polish territory. Warsaw announced that

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7. Polish White Book, p. 47.

8. Gafencu, p. 38.

the decree would go into effect on October 30. On October 26, the German Embassy in the Polish capital formally requested the Polish Government to reverse the passport stamp policy, warning that the Reich Government would find itself compelled to banish all Polish Jews from Germany. The Poles made no immediate reply. Accordingly, under the direction of W. K. Best, Reichsfuhrer-SS and Chief of the German Police, the Gestapo rounded up some fifteen thousand adult male Jews on October 28 and 29 and deported them in special transports to the Polish border. The Polish border guards refused to receive this influx of humanity. So on the night of October 28-29, the Gestapo succeeded in "pushing surreptitiously" some twelve thousand Jews into Poland.<sup>9</sup> In retaliation, the Polish Government issued instructions to expel German nationals from Poznan and Pommerellen. And as the homeless refugees gathered in Polish border towns under wretched conditions, Warsaw agreed to instruct Polish consulates in Germany to grant the control stamp for a normal movement of returnees.<sup>10</sup> In the three day period from October 27 to October 29, some seventeen thousand Jewish males were deported.<sup>11</sup>

Negotiations to relieve the inhuman situation began in Berlin on November 2. When Lipski registered a strong protest over German actions with von Weizsäcker on November 8, the latter brusquely replied: "Poland is taking over Polish property--that is what Polish

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9. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, pp. 117 ff.

10. Ibid., p. 120.

11. Ibid., p. 137.

Jews are."<sup>12</sup> The matter was finally resolved on January 24, 1939. An agreement concluded between the Reich Foreign Ministry and the Polish Embassy in Berlin allowed expelled Jews to return to Germany temporarily, settle their business affairs, and dispose of their property. In addition, the agreement provided for the organization of a special foreign exchange account to facilitate the conclusion of the necessary business transactions. The Polish Government also agreed to receive the refugees' wives and those children under eighteen years of ages. Returnees to Germany were not to exceed one thousand at any one time, and the opportunity for such return expired on July 31, 1939. Under this agreement, some five to six thousand Jews migrated to Poland to join the seventeen thousand deported at the end of October. The Jewish population in the Reich, which had stood at seventy thousand in 1933, dropped to a level of between seven and eight thousand.<sup>13</sup> The Nazis had thus revealed a hint of their method for solving the "Jewish problem." This mass deportation foreshadowed the high refinement of anti-Semitism at Dachau and Buchenwald and Auschwitz.

While the Gestapo carried out its deportations, Colonel Beck agonized over the phrasing and content of his reply to von Ribbentrop. On October 31, he sent a carefully worded, conciliatory though uncompromising, memorandum to Lipski which he instructed the Polish Ambassador to follow precisely or read to the German Foreign Minister. Lipski met von Ribbentrop the very same day and read him Beck's

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12. Ibid., p. 122.

13. Ibid., p. 169.

message. In essence, though accepting the idea of a Gesamtlösung, the Polish Foreign Minister categorically rejected the incorporation of Danzig into Germany. He carefully pointed out Danzig's economic importance to Poland and Poland's growing maritime interests. He reviewed Poland's rights under the existing Danzig statute and insisted on their maintenance. Finally, Beck proposed the replacement of the League of Nations guarantee and the League's prerogatives by a bilateral Polish-German Agreement. He envisioned a treaty which would guarantee the existence of the Free City of Danzig, assure the freedom of a national and cultural life to the city's German majority, and safeguard Polish rights. An attempt to unite Danzig to the Reich, warned the Foreign Minister, would lead to conflict and suspend all possibility of a Polish-German understanding.<sup>14</sup> Von Ribbentrop listened impassively and thanked Ambassador Lipski for the speed of the Polish reply.

Early in November, 1938, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle sought to involve itself in the conduct of German foreign policy, an occurrence which never bode well for the stability of Polish-German relations. On November 7, at the request of this official Party Office for questions pertaining to racial Germans, a conference was held at the Wilhelmstrasse between members of the Foreign Office and the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle. In the course of the meeting, the VM presented von Ribbentrop with a memorandum describing the intolerable situation of the German minority in Poland and requesting intervention on their behalf. When the Foreign Minister demurred, the question

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14. Polish White Book, pp. 48 ff.



was brought to Hitler's attention. A few days later, at a christening in the Hess home, the Führer commented that he "did not intend to put up any longer with the conduct of our eastern neighbors toward my fellow Germans."<sup>15</sup> His remark quieted the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle for a while. Significantly, Hitler spoke of his "eastern neighbors" rather than specifically delineating the supposed offenders. For the Führer had yet to come to a final reckoning with Prague before turning his full attention to Warsaw. It was desirable to pacify Poland for the time being.

Accordingly, on November 19, von Ribbentrop summoned Lipski to the Wilhelmstrasse. The Foreign Minister's purpose seemed to be discreetly to let the Poles understand that he had been responsible for the October 24 initiative at Berchtesgaden rather than Chancellor Hitler. Taking as a basis the Führer's conviction to maintain the best of relations with Poland, a fundamental principle in Reich policy, he had attempted to find a solution which would completely stabilize Polish-German affairs. He had discussed the subject only indefinitely with Hitler, and on the basis that Danzig was predominantly German, had himself formulated the proposals. In conclusion, von Ribbentrop assured Lipski that he had absolutely no intention of confronting Poland with one problem after another. On the other hand, the Polish Ambassador reaffirmed Beck's assertion that an attempt to incorporate Danzig to Germany would mean conflict. He added that the Danzig question particularly irritated Polish public opinion since Poland already had made many concessions to the city's German population.

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15. Robertson, p. 155.

When Lipski inquired about the Foreign Minister's views on his government's proposal for a bilateral Polish-German guarantee of the Free City's status, von Ribbentrop chose one of Beck's favorite replies: procrastination. He would have to study and reflect a good deal more on the whole problem.<sup>16</sup>

Three days later, Ambassador von Moltke called at the Polish Foreign Office to emphasize that his Foreign Minister considered good Polish-German relations of the highest importance. In a friendly talk with Beck, the German Ambassador claimed that he had always warned von Ribbentrop of Poland's adamant attitude in regard to Danzig and had emphasized that Poland would never concur in a drastic solution. He told Beck that Lipski's démarches had thoroughly impressed his Minister with that realization.<sup>17</sup>

The Wilhelmstrasse's conciliatory tone supported what was clearly becoming identifiable, by late November, 1938, as the interim German policy toward Poland: the mailed fist in the velvet glove.<sup>18</sup> For during the same week that von Ribbentrop and von Moltke sought to quiet Polish anxieties in Berlin and Warsaw, the Wehrmacht received a supplementary directive to that issued by Hitler and General Wilhelm Keitel on October 21. This new directive of November 24 added a surprise attack on Danzig to that category of eventualities for which the Reich's armed forces must be prepared at all times. On October 21, Hitler and Keitel had ordered the Wehrmacht to remain

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16. Polish White Book, pp. 51 f.

17. Ibid., pp. 52 f.

18. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 334.

continually ready for the liquidation of Czechoslovakia and the occupation of Memel.<sup>19</sup> The Wehrmacht chiefs considered the military problems of annexing Memel and Danzig as inseparable for geographical reasons alone. Military preparations in Danzig were to be planned in such a way as to co-ordinate operations with an assault on Memel.<sup>20</sup>

An inkling of the possibility of impending doom began to permeate Polish diplomatic circles, however. Anxiety over the Carpatho-Ukraine made possible a new approach to Russia, who also resented German propaganda in Ukrainian territories. Beck tried desperately now to right the disequilibrium in his policy of balance. This new Polish diplomatic offensive resulted in a reaffirmation of the Russo-Polish Nonaggression Pact. Released simultaneously in both capitals, on November 26, the text of the Declaration stated that relations between Poland and Russia would remain based on existing agreements and that the two governments intended to expand their commercial intercourse. Both Poland and the Soviet Union also vowed to curb the various annoying frontier incidents which had recently taken place.<sup>21</sup> Coming on the heels of the mutual acrimony emanating from Warsaw and Moscow during the Munich crisis, this new agreement constituted something of a diplomatic revolution. Yet both nations now had anxieties in common. Both resented the rebuff of being spurned at Munich, both feared German penetration in the Carpatho-

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19. Ibid., p. 335.

20. Robertson, p. 157.

21. Budurowycz, p. 130.

Ukraine and the danger of a revival of the Four-Power Pact.<sup>22</sup>

In this case, though perhaps already too late, Poland followed the precepts of the classical balance of power theory. Fear of the resurgent and triumphant might of the Third Reich led her to a fleeting accommodation with her less aggressive neighbor.

On December 2, Joachim von Ribbentrop asked Jozef Lipski to account for the origin of the Polish-Soviet Declaration. The Polish Ambassador maintained that from a political standpoint the agreement represented no new developments. Poland had merely hoped to prevent future frontier incidents and improve her trade position. The Reich Foreign Minister insisted that Poland's failure to inform the German Government about the Russo-Polish negotiations was not in keeping with the friendliness of Polish-German relations. He resented the "surprise" Poland had sprung on Germany.<sup>23</sup> In retrospect, this moment marked the beginning of the end of Hitler's confidence in Poland as a bulwark against Bolshevism. He would still attempt to threaten and cajole Poland into the Anti-Comintern Pact, but with much less hope for success. And the Polish attitude would slowly force the Führer into a reassessment of his policy towards the U.S.S.R.<sup>24</sup>

As the year drew to a close, Beck initiated efforts to arrange a meeting between Hitler or von Ribbentrop and himself. On December 15, he invited the German Foreign Minister to visit Warsaw to discuss

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22. Ibid., pp. 127 f.

23. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 137.

24. Robertson, p. 156.

the post-Munich state of affairs. Beck also advised von Moltke, who would convey the invitation to his Chief, that he intended to bring up the question of the Carpatho-Ukraine. The conversation closed with the Polish Foreign Minister's inveighing against faits accomplis in Danzig.<sup>25</sup> Yet by December 15, Polish diplomacy could only play out its part, impotent in a drama whose ending had already been determined by the other actor. Robert Coulondre, the French Ambassador to Berlin, wrote his Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet, on this day that the Reich's will for expansion in the East was unquenchable. His conversations with von Ribbentrop and G<sup>o</sup>r<sup>u</sup>ring convinced him that the time of Lebensraum had come.<sup>26</sup>

On December 20, Beck spoke again with von Moltke and requested the German Ambassador to arrange an interview for him with the Reich Foreign Minister. Since the Colonel intended to spend the Christmas holidays in Monte Carlo, he suggested he could stop in Berlin on January 5 or 6 before returning to Warsaw.<sup>27</sup> On January 1, the Reich Chancellery notified the Polish Embassy that the F<sup>u</sup>hrer himself would meet Beck. Meanwhile von Weizs<sup>u</sup>cker drafted a lengthy memorandum as background information for the talks which was submitted to von Ribbentrop on January 2. The State Secretary stressed that Beck should understand that the Reich fully grasped the weakness of his position and expected Poland to become more pliable.<sup>28</sup>

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25. German White Book, p. 203.

26. France, Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, The French Yellow Book, Diplomatic Documents, 1938-1939 (New York, 1940), pp. 41 ff.

27. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 146.

28. Ibid., p. 152.

The first discussion took place on January 5, 1939 in the "Berghof," Hitler's mountain home at Berchtesgaden. The Polish delegation included Beck, Lipski, and Count Michał Lubienski. Hitler, von Ribbentrop, and von Moltke represented the Reich. The Führer opened with the usual tribute to the Pact of 1934 and the community of interests which existed between Poland and Germany, particularly in regard to Russia. Germany desired a strong Poland for, as the Führer remarked, every Polish division engaged against Russia meant the corresponding saving of a German division. Turning to the Danzig situation, Hitler emphasized that it was a German city and, consequently, sooner or later must return to the Reich. He hoped, however, that both governments could find a way out, a mutual agreement in the form of a guarantee securing the interests of Poland and Germany. Danzig, Hitler stressed, was the key question. Its removal as an irritant would lead to a quick settlement of all other difficulties. In that case, he stood ready to give Poland an assurance similar to that he had given France with respect to Alsace-Lorraine. Finally, he mentioned his interest in expanding the channels of communication between Germany and East Prussia. Beck replied that Danzig represented a thorny problem for the Polish Foreign Office because of the great sensitivity of the widest sectors of Polish society on the matter. Although he did not think the Reich Chancellor's suggestion offered much possibility for a settlement, he nevertheless would consider it at his leisure. Hitler hastened to reiterate that Germany contemplated no faits accomplis in Danzig and promised to do nothing there which

would render difficult the position of the Polish Government. Yet, he mused, perhaps a new form, a new solution, which he termed "Körperschaft," might still be found to safeguard the German population in Danzig and Polish interests.<sup>29</sup>

The next day the scene shifted to Munich, where Beck and von Ribbentrop exchanged parting comments. The Polish Foreign Minister, disturbed by the substance of Hitler's remarks, asked his German colleague to inform the Reich Chancellor that, although previous meetings with German statesmen had always engendered feelings of optimism on the Polish side, he was coming away from this encounter in a pessimistic mood. The Polish diplomat saw no possibility of agreement in the Danzig question. Von Ribbentrop, eschewing once again any violent solution, echoed Hitler's platitudes about the German desire to strengthen friendly relations between the two countries.<sup>30</sup>

The German Foreign Minister returned Beck's visit in late January. Arriving in Warsaw on January 25, he engaged in a series of discussions with various Polish leaders. In an interview with President Moscicki, von Ribbentrop solemnly stated on behalf of the Reich Chancellor that Germany counted upon an enduring understanding with Poland and that this position constituted a fundamental principle of the Chancellor's foreign policy. With Marshal Smigly-Rydz, von Ribbentrop raised the Russian specter, asserting that the irrationality of Communist behavior precluded the stabilization of Russo-Polish relations. But the

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29. Polish White Book, pp. 53 f.

30. Ibid., p. 54.

principal talks occurred at the Polish Foreign Office where Danzig occupied the limelight. For the last time, Beck and von Ribbentrop managed to agree. In a "gentlemen's agreement" of sorts, the two Foreign Ministers concluded that if the League of Nations withdrew from the Free City, Poland and Germany would publish a joint declaration maintaining the status quo in Danzig until a definite understanding between Germany and Poland were reached. On the other hand, Beck put the damper on what ever public relations value the innocuous agreement might have had by categorically rejecting the German request for an extra-territorial motor road across the "Corridor." The tenor of the visit was well summarized in the bland nature of the communiqué issued on von Ribbentrop's departure on January 27. The discussions had not dispelled Polish anxieties. For von Ribbentrop has proposed the return of the Free City to the Reich in exchange for a general settlement of all outstanding Polish-German questions and the final recognition of Polish-German frontiers. His position had not changed from what he had told Beck on October 24, 1938. The Germans were still thinking in terms of Gesamtlösung. Beck, however, would not part with tangible rights in exchange for mere assurances. He did express a willingness to discuss joint efforts to improve transportation facilities across the "Corridor." Yet, as he explained to von Ribbentrop, to accept Danzig's reunion with the Reich would effectively mean German control over the mouth of the Vistula and hence be tantamount to bestowing control of Polish economic and political life on the Wilhelmstrasse.<sup>31</sup> Thus on the fifth anniversary of the Nonaggression

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31. Ibid., pp. 55 ff.



Pact, Poland and Germany had drifted farther apart.

Ignoring Poland's fourth rejection of an invitation to join the Anti-Comintern Pact during the course of the von Ribbentrop visit, Hitler praised the Polish-German détente in a speech before the Reichstag on January 30. Declaring that the 1934 Nonaggression Pact was a stable factor in Europe's uncertain political life, the Führer hoped that the Polish-German friendship would endure.<sup>32</sup>

Whether the relative warmth of Hitler's comments provided the nervous Polish Foreign Office with new hope or the imperiousness of the German suggestions for the annexation of Danzig induced flirtation with appeasement, Warsaw apparently drafted a possible compromise solution in the Danzig dispute. Worked out sometime between von Ribbentrop's visit and the German occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia on March 15, the proposal essentially called for a partition of the Free City. Poland would control the western sector of the Danzig territory as well as a railway and a new canal connection with the Vistula. In a conversation with Sir Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Warsaw, Miroslaw Arciszewski, Assistant Under Secretary in the Polish Foreign Office, confirmed the existence of such a plan.<sup>33</sup> Although the Poles never presented the proposal to the Wilhelmstrasse, it surfaced later, at a more critical time, in Italian hands.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as Hitler had admitted to his General Staff, Danzig constituted merely an excuse for war and a convenient weapon for exacerbating

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32. Ibid., p. 59

33. Gerhard Weinberg, "A Proposed Compromise Over Danzig in 1939?" Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XIV, January 1955, Number 4, p. 336.

34. Ibid., p. 337.

relations with Poland. A compromise over the Free City would not prevent the acquisition of Lebensraum.

In a routine audience with Szembek on February 6, von Moltke insisted that von Ribbentrop fully understood the reasons for Poland's refusal to join the Anti-Comintern arrangement. He cautioned Szembek, who retorted that the Warsaw conversation had produced no results, that Berlin failed to appreciate economic arguments. Consequently, Poland's protestations that an annexation of Danzig would render her a vassal state made little impression at the Wilhelmstrasse.<sup>35</sup>

In accordance with the German proposals of June, 1938, a joint commission of Polish-German experts on the minority question met in Berlin between February 27 and March 3. Earlier the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle under pressure gave way to Foreign Office handling of this Polish-German conference. While agreeing on February 8 to remain hidden, the VM insisted upon having some influence in drawing up instructions for the German delegation and ultimately making decisions during the conference. On February 9, von Ribbentrop, long-harried by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, capitulated to their watered-down demands.<sup>36</sup> The agenda for these meetings included questions of land tenure, inheritance, schools and churches, equal rights to employment, and minority organizations. The outcome of the talks was, at best, abortive. From the beginning, the Poles assumed a negative attitude and refused to consider most of the German

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35. Polish White Book, p. 58.

36. MacAlister Brown, "The Third Reich's Mobilization of the German Fifth Column in Eastern Europe.", Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol. XIX, July, 1959, Number 2, p. 134.

suggestions. And they would not acquiesce in the issuance of any sort of joint communiqué at the conclusion of the discussions.<sup>37</sup>

Minorities negotiations were never resumed.

In early March, 1939, Grigore Gafencu, the Rumanian Foreign Minister, visited Warsaw. He found the mood of the Polish capital restive and strained. Political circles were launching attacks on Beck for allowing himself to be fooled by Hitler. The Polish Foreign Minister remained impassive. He told Gafencu on March 5 that he still maintained full confidence in Hitler's word. Having spoken to the Chancellor "man to man, soldier to soldier" since 1935, Beck rested that confidence on the fact that he had never been deceived by the Führer.<sup>38</sup> Yet Beck soberly and quietly insisted that if Germany touched Danzig, he saw no alternative but war. Poland would fight for a port that handled seven million tons of Polish exports every year. He believed, however, that the Danzig question could be settled amicably. He trusted the Führer.<sup>39</sup> Ten days later, Germany invaded Bohemia; Prague and the rest of Czechoslovakia fell. On March 23, the Reich seized Memel.

The country most immediately affected by this stunning turn of events was Poland. The Hungarian seizure of the Carpatho-Ukraine now meant little. In the autumn of 1938, a common frontier with Hungary had practical value. Now, with Slovakia under German control,

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37. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, pp. 170 f.

38. Gafencu, p. 40.

39. Ibid., p. 41.

the possibility of an ally to the South vanished.<sup>40</sup> Poland was virtually encircled. When von Ribbentrop summoned Lipski on March 21 and presented the Polish Ambassador with a virtual ultimatum over Danzig, the mood in Warsaw turned desperate.

The German Foreign Minister inquired first why Poland had not replied to the Führer's proposals of March 5. Hitler, he said, remained in favor of good relations with Poland and desired to see Beck personally once again. Von Ribbentrop expressed his belief that the present deterioration in Polish relations with the Reich indicated a misunderstanding of Germany's real aims. Gradually, the conversation became more heated as von Ribbentrop reminded Lipski that the German defeat of Russia in the World War had led to the emergence of the Polish State. Hitler alone had smashed General von Schleicher's plans for German-Soviet co-operation. Danzig and the "Corridor" had belonged to the Second Reich. Poland had obtained them through Germany's breakdown. At this point, Lipski, bursting with indignation at the lecture to which von Ribbentrop was subjecting him, exclaimed that before the partitions those areas had belonged to Poland. The Foreign Minister replied that he did not intend to appeal to purely historical conceptions, for the Führer was concerned with ethnic factors. Lipski interrupted brusquely: the "Corridor" was certainly Polish and the Führer had just finished appealing to historical arguments in the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia. Von Ribbentrop demurred. He turned to Danzig and the guarantee which Hitler wanted to grant with respect to Poland's frontiers and the "Corridor" in particular. He

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40. Robertson, p. 163.

emphasized that no previous German Government would have given such a guarantee. In connection with Danzig, the motor road through the "Corridor," and the guarantee, von Ribbentrop hinted that Slovakia might become an appropriate area for Polish-German co-operation. Finally, any Polish-German understanding would include explicit anti-Soviet tendencies. Germany would never collaborate with the Soviet Union. Lipski simply mentioned that the German protectorate over Slovakia shocked Poland and worsened Polish-German relations. Concerned with the import of von Ribbentrop's remarks, he dispatched Prince Lubomirski to Warsaw with a report of his conversation and prepared to return to Poland on call.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Poland had acquired an unexpected ally in British public opinion. On March 21, 1939, Neville Chamberlain, changing course, suggested a consultative pact between the French, Polish, Soviet, and British Governments. Beck realized he was pressed for time. He had to stay the German diplomatic offensive as quickly as possible without abandoning his policy of balance to which he had clung for so long. He would agree to an alliance with Britain but could not afford to provoke Hitler with a Russian alliance. The Polish Foreign Minister hoped that linking up with Britain would not destroy the possibility of effecting a reconciliation with the Reich.<sup>42</sup> He was wrong. By March, 1939, the policy of balance lay in shambles. Precious little time remained for a post-mortem. Yet, Colonel Beck would not be moved from the ideas he had carefully nurtured under

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41. Polish White Book, pp. 61 ff.

42. Gafencu, p. 48.

Pilsudski. As Ciano phrased it on March 5 in a conversation with von Mackensen, the German Ambassador in Rome: "There are no new ideas in Warsaw. Everyone regards himself as the guardian of the Pilsudskian heritage. Poland is living under the dictatorship of a dead man."<sup>43</sup>

Accordingly, Beck instructed Count Edward Raczyński, the Polish Ambassador in London, to suggest to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, a Polish-British bilateral agreement in the spirit of the proposed consultative pact. The Colonel did not wish to waste time in multilateral negotiations,<sup>44</sup> or involve himself with the Russians. Raczyński presented the Polish proposal to Lord Halifax on March 24, without rendering an affirmative or negative reply to the original British démarche. A day earlier, Marshal Smigly-Rydz, disturbed by German interference in Lithuania and Slovakia, ordered a partial mobilization, moving four divisions to the East Prussian frontier.<sup>45</sup> On March 24, four classes of Polish reserves were called up. Under Secretary of State Arciszewski told von Moltke that Poland would never fight in the interest of other powers. She would reluctantly join, however, if need be, a general combination of powers to protect her own interests.<sup>46</sup>

With Czechoslovakia and Memel safely under the Reich's control, Hitler now turned his attention to Poland. As of March 25, the

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43. DGFP, Series D, Vol. V, p. 178.

44. Polish White Book, pp. 70 f.

45. Roos, p. 160.

46. German White Book, pp. 212 f.

Führer was not absolutely convinced that Poland must be destroyed. A conversation between Hitler and General von Brauchitsch, Chief of the Army High Command, indicates that the Reich Chancellor on that day, still entertained thoughts of negotiating Slovakia's future. In fact, von Brauchitsch formed the impression that Slovakia might serve as a bargaining counter with Hungary and Poland. Hitler told the General that he did not intend to solve the Danzig problem by force, for this would drive Poland into the arms of Britain. He would contemplate a seizure of the town only if the Polish Government hinted that a fait accompli might dent Poland's sense of honor less than a voluntary cession. The Führer still expected to encounter "realism" in Warsaw.<sup>47</sup>

But in Warsaw, that "realism" was overshadowed by a stubborn sense of honor. Ambassador Lipski had gone to the Polish capital to personally discuss von Ribbentrop's latest statements with his chief. Beck once again affirmed that better railroad and road transits could be constructed in the "Corridor" but rejected extraterritoriality. Poland would seek to find a solution based on a joint Polish-German guarantee to the Free City of Danzig. Polish interests were, furthermore, synonymous with the interests of the population of Danzig since the city's well being had for centuries depended on Polish maritime trade. Although Beck desired to discuss these matters with Hitler as quickly as possible, he suggested some preliminary diplomatic groundwork so as not to worsen the situation

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47. Robertson, pp. 163f.

if personal contact between the two leaders came to naught.<sup>48</sup>

Lipski returned to Berlin on March 26 and called on von Ribbentrop immediately. The German Foreign Minister gave him a "distinctly cold reception."<sup>49</sup> Von Ribbentrop stated, with some excitement, that the Reich had received news of the Polish mobilization. Troop movements had been observed in the "Corridor." These actions had produced a hostile impression in Germany. Germany would consider any Polish move against Danzig as aggression against the Reich. Lipski protested that German fortifications in Slovakia and the unexpected ultimatum to Lithuania had caused Poland to undertake strictly defensive measures. The Reich Foreign Minister took little note. He proposed once again the German conception of a very broad Polish-German Ausgleich based on the principle of Poland's and the Reich's mutual dependence. Thus Germany would recognize Poland's priority of right in the Ukrainian question, despite an expected adverse reaction of German popular opinion. Slovakia could also become an object of accommodation. Yet von Ribbentrop feared that the Führer would lose patience with Poland unless an understanding was quickly reached. Since the Polish reply had not clearly established the bounds of discussion, he saw little possibility of a meeting between the Führer and Minister Beck. Germany would consider what further steps to take.<sup>50</sup>

Those steps were not long in coming. On March 27, the Nazis

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48. Polish White Book, pp. 64ff.

49. Ibid., p. 66.

50. Ibid., pp. 66ff.



launched a vicious press campaign accusing the Poles of atrocious behavior towards their German minority.<sup>51</sup> As Ciano remarked in his diary, the virulent tone of the German press was disturbingly reminiscent of earlier propaganda forays against Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>52</sup>

The next day, Beck summoned von Moltke and told the German Ambassador the essence of von Ribbentrop's remarks to Lipski on March 26. In response to the German statement that a Polish move against Danzig would be regarded as aggression against the Reich, Beck declared that the Polish Government would also consider any German intervention aimed at changing the status quo in Danzig as aggression against Poland. He asked von Moltke to convey similar sentiments to the Senate of the Free City. Yet the Polish Foreign Minister reiterated Poland's willingness to negotiate an agreement and her determination to avoid a violent confrontation. When von Moltke accused his host of wanting to negotiate at the point of a bayonet, Beck coldly replied that such was the German method.<sup>53</sup> That evening at a diplomatic reception von Moltke met Rumanian Ambassador Franassovici who declared that the Danzig problem seemed to be merely an "affair of nuances." Count von Moltke, abandoning his habitual reserve for a second time, pointed heatedly to a map of Europe on which Germany was marked in yellow and Danzig in blue.

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51. Elizabeth Wiskemann, Europe of the Dictators 1919-1945 (New York, 1966), p. 155.

52. Count Galeazzo Ciano di Cortellazzo, The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943 (New York, 1946), p. 67.

53. Polish White Book, p. 69.

The blue spot, stormed von Moltke, must disappear. It was absolutely essential to the Führer's prestige to incorporate Danzig in the Reich.<sup>54</sup> The blue spot would necessarily become yellow.

While Poles and Germans railed at each other, the British Foreign Office quietly digested the contents and consequences of the Polish note. On March 30, Sir Howard Kennard and Beck were discussing the European state of events when the Secretary of the British Embassy interrupted their talk. He delivered a telegram in which the British Government inquired whether Poland objected to a British guarantee to meet any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish Government considered it vital to resist with their national forces.<sup>55</sup> Beck happily accepted the British proposal. His diplomatic maneuvering had worked again. Poland and Mister Beck could breathe a sigh of relief.

On March 31, Neville Chamberlain publically announced the British guarantee in the House of Commons. This Prime Minister who had taken Britain down the road of appeasement now placed the ultimate decision as to whether Britain went to war in the hands of another country. Since British Foreign Secretaries had always maneuvered feverishly to keep control of foreign policy at Whitehall, Chamberlain's declaration was a remarkable statement indeed.<sup>56</sup> He spoke also for the French Government which took the same position as Britain.

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54. Gafencu, p. 45.

55. Polish White Book, pp. 71f.

56. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 374.

As Beck prepared to leave for London for explanatory talks, Hitler fumed. Furious at the Polish Foreign Minister's deft move which had tripped him with the British guarantee, Hitler recalled Ambassador von Moltke. On April 3, the day Beck arrived in London, he ordered General Keitel to draw up a plan for the invasion of Poland. Keitel laid down the operational aims in a general directive issued on April 11 entitled "Operation White." The directive contained a timetable which remained unaltered until the eve of the outbreak of hostilities. Although the preamble stated that Germany would continue to avoid hostilities, Poland was to be smashed unless she reversed her policy. September 1 was targeted as the earliest date for placing the directive into force. Final frontiers in the East and on the Baltic were to be determined by military needs.<sup>57</sup> Thus an uneasy calm settled on Polish-German relations which optimists quickly labeled a détente.

Meanwhile Colonel Beck's mission to London ended satisfactorily on April 6 with a joint Anglo-Polish communiqué. In effect, Beck had gotten his bilateral agreement, for the two countries now decided to enter into a permanent and reciprocal agreement to replace the temporary and unilateral assurance given by the British Government on March 31. Pending the completion of this permanent agreement, Beck promised that Poland would consider herself obligated to render assistance to Britain under the same conditions delineated in the temporary unilateral assurance already given by His Majesty's

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57. Robertson, p. 166.

Government.<sup>58</sup>

Also on April 6, Lipski told von Weizsäcker that Poland wished to stand by the Pact of 1934 and that the British arrangements were of a purely defensive character. The Polish Ambassador stressed that the Anglo-Polish talks were merely an extension of the Polish-French alliance, long considered by Germany as compatible with the 1934 agreement. Unusually terse, von Weizsäcker simply answered that recent developments in Polish policy were incomprehensible.<sup>59</sup> The State Secretary had little to say because Hitler had broken off conversations in Warsaw as well as Berlin. Lipski's comments, however, characterized the ambivalence of Beck's diplomacy. The Polish Foreign Minister sincerely hoped to convince the Germans that the British pact of mutual assistance simply represented the "juridical expression" of a system of security which already existed in fact. He pressed the idea that the alliance with Great Britain was a natural and logical complement to Poland's arrangement with France, which Hitler seemingly approved. And the keystone of Polish security rested on the nonaggression pacts rather than the British and French alliance.<sup>60</sup> If that were the case, his strenuous efforts in London represented a colossal waste of time. Once again Beck attempted to twist his way out of choosing sides with contorted

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58. Great Britain, Documents concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities Between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939, The British War Blue Book (New York, 1939), p. 49.

59. Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War, p. 221.

60. Gafencu, p. 49.

verbal acrobatics. Hitler, though, would have none of the policy of balance.

On April 16, 1939, Rumanian Foreign Minister Gafencu passed through Poland on his way to Berlin. At the Polish-Rumanian border Beck joined Gafencu's train and, in an all-night rail journey, he unburdened his thoughts on the Rumanian diplomat. He would be the last person to abandon Danzig, though he did not want war. With the British alliance he had merely parried the blow Hitler sought to strike, yet he had not changed the basic principles of his policy. Beck begged the Rumanian to employ his good offices to convince Hitler that peace depended on mutual communication. The Reich's silence distressed the Polish Foreign Minister. After five years of perfect entente he could not understand Germany's reluctance to reason together.<sup>61</sup> He confessed that he had wrongly estimated the importance of Polish good will to Hitler's foreign policy. Since the Führer knew the reality of the Soviet danger, he would never come to terms with the Communists. By making war on Poland he would play Russia's game since a weakened Poland could hardly protect him from Bolshevism.<sup>62</sup> The Polish Foreign Minister had come to believe the siren song long crooned by the Reich's erstwhile propagandists. Though dismayed by von Ribbentrop's interview with Lipski on October 24, 1938, Beck felt reasonably confident war would be avoided. Ever the rationalist, he could not conceive that Hitler would risk the welfare of the German people in a possibly disastrous adventure.

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61. Ibid., p. 27.

62. Ibid., p. 47.

He believed to the very end that the Führer was a sane statesman who wanted the best for his people. Hitler used tension to obtain concessions. If his bluff were called, he would back down. Most assuredly, however, Hitler would not chance a two-front war. Consequently, as late as August 15, the Colonel was telling friends that he foresaw only a fifty per cent probability for war. As a final resort to save the peace, Great Britain and France would relinquish their African colonies so that the Führer could satisfy the German need for Lebensraum.<sup>63</sup>

Beck's illusions about five years of perfect entente vanished abruptly on April 28 when Hitler finally answered the Polish proposals of March 26. In a speech to the Reichstag, the Führer and Reich Chancellor repudiated what were supposedly the two mainstays of his foreign policy: the January 26, 1934, Nonaggression Pact with Poland and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 18, 1935. Labeling the "Corridor" Germany's most painful problem, he nevertheless continued to recognize Poland's right of access to the sea. Accordingly, he offered Poland a final proposal. Danzig would return to the Reich and Germany would receive a motor road and railway with extraterritorial status through the "Corridor." In return, he was willing to recognize all Polish economic rights in Danzig, insure Poland a large, free access harbor there, accept the frontiers be-

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63. Private information obtained by the author in an interview with Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, Minister of Education in Poland to 1935, former Vice Minister of Finance, and personal friend of Colonel Beck on April 4, 1968, at the Jozef Piłsudski Institute for Research in the Modern History of Poland, New York City.

tween Germany and Poland as final, conclude a twenty-five year pact of nonaggression, and jointly with Poland and Hungary safeguard the independence of the Slovak State.<sup>64</sup> A memorandum delivered by the German Charge in Warsaw, von Wühlisch, to the Polish Foreign Office repeated Hitler's offer and contained a listing of Germany's reasons for repudiating the 1934 pact. It stated explicitly that the Reich Government regarded the Anglo-Polish arrangement as a contradiction of the Nonaggression Pact and as a radical change in Polish foreign policy which it greeted with astonishment. Yet if the Polish Government should wish to settle contractually the issues in dispute, Germany stood ready to oblige.<sup>65</sup>

Significantly, Hitler refrained from lambasting in his customary insulting way that ravenous goliath of the East, the Soviet Union. The Germans had actually modified their anti-Soviet intransigence in January, 1939, when economic conversations were initiated. After a short interruption, Soviet Ambassador Alexei Merekalov and von Weizsäcker resumed the talks on April 17.<sup>66</sup> On May 7, Robert Coulondre informed his government of the probability of eventual Soviet-German collusion.<sup>67</sup> The report was ignored. The United States Department of State also regularly obtained secret information on the German-Soviet talks.<sup>68</sup> The failure to exchange

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64. Documents on the Events Preceding the Outbreak of the War, pp. 226ff.

65. Ibid., pp. 222ff.

66. Debicki, p. 148.

67. French Yellow Book, pp. 145ff.

68. Debicki, p. 148.

intelligence made for the great surprise in August. Meanwhile Polish desires to reach an accommodation with Moscow through the vehicle of the four-party British proposal were also dampened on May 7 after a conversation between Polish Ambassador Grzybowski and the new Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, who had replaced Litvinov on May 3. Molotov told Grzybowski that the Soviet Union would sign the British-sponsored agreement only if Poland assured Soviet troops the right of passage through Polish territory and dissolved her alliance with Rumania. In addition, Britain could guarantee Poland's western frontiers only.<sup>69</sup> Poland's neighbors once again envisioned her partition. Beck, whose fondness for symmetry manifested itself continuously in his policy, should have appreciated the balanced correspondence of Germany's and Russia's demands.

On May 5 in an address to the Sejm, Beck politely but firmly answered Hitler's demands and renunciation of the Nonaggression Pact. He pointed out the obvious difference in interpretation of the 1934 agreement, indicating that Poland did not sign the pact in the understanding that it prevented normal friendly collaboration with the Western Powers. Germany had used the agreement as a ground for demanding unilateral concessions contrary to Poland's vital interests. A self-respecting nation did not yield to such extortion. Furthermore, there was no true reciprocity in Hitler's proposals. The Führer generously intended to recognize rights and frontiers which were both de jure and de facto Poland's. As for

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69. Ibid., p. 149.



the suggested condominium over Slovakia, Poland eschewed the custom of bargaining with the interests of others. The Polish Foreign Minister repeated his willingness to negotiate but only under conditions of peaceful intentions and procedures. He would not talk into the barrel of a gun. Finally, in what ranks as Beck's noblest moment, he declared that he did not accept peace at any price. "There is only one thing in the life of men, nations, and states which is without price, and that is honor."<sup>70</sup> In a memorandum sent to the German Foreign Ministry on the day of Beck's speech, the Poles restated their proposals of March 26 for a joint guarantee of Danzig and negotiations in regard to improving travel through the "Corridor." And although the Nonaggression Pact of 1934 had been concluded for a period of ten years without possibility of prior denunciation, the Polish Government would entertain suggestions for a new Polish-German treaty.<sup>71</sup>

The mutual hostility generated by Hitler's speech and Beck's reply induced Ambassador Lipski to tender his resignation. Due to his association with the 1934 declaration, Lipski felt his continued presence in Berlin would produce no meaningful results and perhaps stymie further efforts at reconciliation. Though Beck did not deny his Ambassador's arguments, he asked him to remain at his post at least temporarily.<sup>72</sup> Lipski complied with the request.

Up to March, 1939, Poland's security rested almost exclusively

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70. Polish White Book, pp. 84ff.

71. Ibid., pp. 88ff.

72. Debicki, p. 142.

on the traditional alliance with France of 1921. While negotiations for the final confirmation of an agreement with Britain proceeded apace, Polish diplomacy sought to consolidate her military position in discussions with France. Polish Ambassador Lukasiewicz and Foreign Minister Bonnet had adjusted the terms of the Franco-Polish alliance to the stipulations of the British declaration on April 6 and the French Cabinet unanimously confirmed the Bonnet-Lukasiewicz protocol on May 12.<sup>73</sup> On May 19, General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, the Polish Minister of Military Affairs, and General Maurice Gamelin, Chief of the French General Staff, concluded a military convention. The agreement obliged France to open an offensive against German forces with the bulk of her troops not later than fifteen days after the mobilization of the French Army.<sup>74</sup> Gamelin, however, in sending the text of the agreement to the Quai d'Orsay, attached a letter making the convention inoperative until Bonnet formally affixed his signature to the political protocol. The French Foreign Minister delayed signing the protocol and later set it aside. Gamelin never informed the Poles, who based their strategic plans, meanwhile, on the military convention. By saying nothing the French Chief of Staff thought he would stiffen Polish resistance to German aggression.<sup>75</sup> To some extent, then, Beck's visceral distrust of the French was vindicated.

On May 23, the day after the signature of the Pact of Steel

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73. Ibid., p. 145.

74. Roos, p. 162.

75. Debicki, p. 146.

and before Ciano had left Berlin, Hitler again summoned his generals to a secret staff conference. After the conception of "Operation White" in early April, German military planning proceeded in two directions: operations for a war against Poland and plans for a blockade against Britain. The purpose of this conference was to relate and integrate the plans developed so far. The Führer, as usual, dominated the meeting. Opening with the invariable harangue about Lebensraum, he turned to the reasons for his decision to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity. Poland had ceased to be an effective barrier to Russia since Hitler expected Poland's internal resistance to Communism to collapse. She had always stood with the Reich's enemies and intended to do Germany harm. Since the chances for a quick victory in the West appeared slim, Poland would have to be neutralized speedily. In the event of a war on the Western front, Poland's land area would provide surplus food for Germany. Hitler did not intend to repeat the Czech affair. This time he expected a fight. Yet it was necessary to localize the conflict since simultaneous war with the Western Powers would strain the Reich's capabilities.<sup>76</sup> And so, Germany passed the point of no return.

At the end of May, Danzig reoccupied the limelight. A troop of S. A. ransacked a house inhabited by Polish customs officials on the frontier of East Prussia. When a deputy of Polish Commissioner General Marjan Chodacki arrived on the scene to inspect the damage, the Storm Troopers converged on his car, threatening his chauffeur with bodily violence. The chauffeur shot and killed one

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76. Robertson, pp. 172f.

of his attackers in self-defense. The next day the German Press excitedly reported that a Danzig citizen, going through a deserted village in a taxi, had been killed when a Polish chauffeur "dazzled" the taxi driver with his headlights. Chodacki meanwhile protested to no avail. Taking up the "Kalthof" incident as a cause célèbre, the Danzig Senate demanded sanctions, compensation and apologies. The Poles, of course, refused. On May 25, the greatly lamented gentleman was laid to rest at Marienburg in a funeral graced by the presence of President Greiser and Gauleiter Forster as well as special wreath, delivered by airplane, from Adolf Hitler.<sup>77</sup>

Tension over the Danzig situation escalated further on June 3 when Greiser, in a note to Chodacki, restricted the activity of Polish customs officials. Claiming that the Danzig population felt offended by the conduct of the Polish officials in the performance of their duties, Greiser ordered the customs inspectors to confine themselves to their offices and declared that the Danzig customs men would no longer take instructions from their Polish counterparts.<sup>78</sup> On June 4, Forster delivered a cocky speech at the festival of the Danzig Labor Service. He urged Danzigers to allow the Poles to lose their tempers first. Asking them to hold out a little longer, he boasted that four hundred thousand people of Danzig were waiting, resolute, at the mouth of the Vistula, looking only to the Führer.<sup>79</sup>

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77. French Yellow Book, pp. 165f.

78. British War Blue Book, pp. 87f.

79. French Yellow Book, pp. 173f.

The Poles responded with a sharply worded protest delivered to Greiser by Commissioner General Chodacki. The note categorically denied any misbehavior on the part of the Polish customs inspectors and rejected the restrictions placed on their activity. Since the territory of the Free City was legally and by virtue of treaty obligations part of the Polish Customs Territory, the Polish Government would meet any attempts to obstruct the proper functioning of the customs system with measures designed to fully protect Poland's rights and to bear unfavorably on Danzig's economic interests.<sup>80</sup> While Poland vehemently protested these various provocations, rumors spread that on June 15 the Nazis under the leadership of Albert Forster would proclaim in the Danzig Parliament the incorporation of the Free City into the Reich. According to reports, Germany hoped to trap Poland into a first strike. Then, under the circumstances, Britain and France could not both honor their guarantees and ignore the German counterattack.<sup>81</sup> While the diplomats in the Polish Foreign Office fidgeted nervously, June 15 passed without any attempt at Anschluss.

While Danzig seethed, Hitler remained at Berchtesgaden throughout June, 1939, supervising the completion of military plans for the invasion of Poland. On June 15, General von Brauchitsch presented him with the operational plan commissioned by the directive of April 1. The principal German objective was to prevent a mobilization and concentration of the Polish Army by a swift, surprise

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80. British War Blue Book, pp. 89f.

81. Lee, p. 402.

attack. In a pincer action, the Wehrmacht would strike from East Prussia in the north and from Silesia in the south, and occupy the "Corridor" as quickly as possible for psychological and tactical reasons. A supplemental directive issued at this time ordered all preparations for "Operation White" to be in effect by August 20. On June 22, General Keitel submitted a preliminary timetable for the attack to Hitler. The next day, the Reich Defense Council met for the second time under the chairmanship of Hermann Göring. This body included some thirty-five ranking civil and military officials whose duty it was to plan and prepare the Reich for war. A master plan for total mobilization was drafted.<sup>82</sup>

Only when Molotov told Grybowski that Soviet help to Poland meant the presence of the Red Army on Polish soil did the Polish leaders seriously consider the imminent possibility of another partition. Even then, however, Polish contingency defense planning did not take account of military opposition from the U.S.S.R. The reason was simple: Poland did not possess the wherewithal in terms of military hardware or economic support to dream of effectively fighting a two-front war. The Polish operational procedure, known as "West," envisaged the massing of every conceivable fighting unit on the Western frontier. Yet while the Germans carefully drew up "Operation White" in detail, "West" was worked out hurriedly and never fully communicated to field commanders. Furthermore, instead of attempting to break any German maneuver of encirclement by concentrating Polish forces in strong and tenable defensive positions,

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82. Shirer, pp. 664ff.

Marshal Smigly-Rydz finally decided to defend the entire Polish-German frontier. In addition the Poles overestimated the importance of East Prussia as a key factor in the German operational plan. The fatal flaw in the Polish defense was the lack of cohesive war preparation of army units.<sup>83</sup> Once again a paucity of armed might would negate Polish gallantry.

For some time the Germans smuggled men and matériel into Danzig to build up a local defense force. On June 19 the Wehrmacht High Command informed the Foreign Office that one hundred sixty-eight army officers were in the Free City in civilian clothes on a tour for study purposes. By early July, the Germans succeeded in moving heavy artillery, twelve light and four heavy guns, into Danzig past the Polish customs inspectors.<sup>84</sup> As early as June 25, Gauleiter Forster felt emboldened to prophesy in a speech that the Free City of Danzig would soon come to an end and that he knew how it would end. Danzig was in the final throes of its fight for freedom.<sup>85</sup> The July crisis over the militarization of the Free City followed. The Danzig defense measures, which were equally adaptable for offensive purposes, sparked Polish protests. The Germans and the city's Senators countered that the anticipation of a Polish attack necessitated a purely defensive militarization. The Polish Government, however, refused to believe such disclaimers and reinforced their customs inspectors with a considerable number of fron-

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83. Roos, p. 164.

84. Shirer, p. 667.

85. British War Blue Book, pp. 92f.

tier guards. Various economic measures prejudicial to the trade of the Free City were also taken.<sup>86</sup> The retaliatory actions convinced Hitler that he could neither intimidate Poland with threats nor further woo her with illusory promises of aggrandizement at the expense of Russia. And so his determination to crush the Poles by war was strengthened.<sup>87</sup> Yet as preparations to bring "Operation White" into effect continued, Hitler had to mark time. On July 19, he instructed Forster to achieve a temporary cooling of passions in Danzig. Accordingly, the Gauleiter told League High Commissioner Burckhardt that the Führer, though not modifying his claims in regard to Danzig, would do nothing to provoke a war. A settlement of the question could wait until 1940 or longer. Forster invited the High Commissioner to mediate disputes arising between the Danzig Senate and Poland.<sup>88</sup>

In midsummer support for Poland began to manifest itself. On July 1, Georges Bonnet had told the German Ambassador to Paris, Count von Welczeck, that any action tending to modify the status quo in Danzig and consequently provoking armed resistance by Poland would bring the Franco-Polish Agreement into play and oblige France to give immediate assistance to Poland.<sup>89</sup> On July 19, General Sir Edmund Ironside, Chief of His Majesty's Imperial General Staff,

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86. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 405.

87. Sir Nevile Henderson, Failure of a Mission (New York, 1940), pp. 251f.

88. British War Blue Book, pp. 103ff.

89. French Yellow Book, p. 197.



visited Warsaw to discuss military cooperation. Although his mission was a failure, it buoyed Polish spirits. But the stark fact remained, as Ironside told the Poles, that contrary to previous promises Britain would scarcely equip them with armaments by autumn. The belief in Polish General Staff circles that Germany would attack Poland towards the end of August heightened the prevailing depression.<sup>90</sup> Negotiations for a British loan, though not as successful as anticipated, did result in an agreement on August 2 granting the Poles a loan of eight million one hundred sixty-three thousand pounds sterling.

In August, however, the customs dispute in Danzig flared up once again. Since the Danzig Senate had continued to interfere with the activities of the Polish customs officials, Poland retaliated by imposing tariff duties upon certain imports from Danzig.<sup>91</sup> Acting on instructions from the Danzig Senate, the Free City's customs officials on the East Prussian frontier informed the Polish inspectors on August 4 that they could no longer perform their function of control beginning at seven o'clock in the morning of August 6. Chodacki, the Polish Commissioner General, immediately served Greiser with an ultimatum. Unless the President of the Danzig Senate countermanded the steps taken by his subordinates by six o'clock in the evening, August 5, the Polish Government would swiftly initiate reprisals against the Free City. The responsibility for these would

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90. Robertson, p. 174 and Wheeler-Bennett, p. 406.

91. Lee, pp. 402f.

fall entirely on the Senate.<sup>92</sup> Greiser informed Chodacki by telephone on the afternoon of August 5 that no official body of the Danzig Government had ordered its representatives to prohibit the Polish customs inspectors from carrying out their duties. On August 6, in an acerbic note to Chodacki, Greiser argued that the Poles had acted precipitantly in response to a baseless rumor, indicating that the Polish Government "was courting, at a time of great political unrest, dangers which might lead to incalculable disasters."<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, he energetically protested the reprisals threatened by Poland. The Polish ultimatum was represented in Germany as evidence that Poland intended to seize the city. Forster, after a summons to Berlin, returned with word that Hitler had reached the limit of his patience.<sup>94</sup> On August 9, von Weizsäcker told the Polish Charge in Berlin, Prince Lubomirski, that any future ultimatums and threats of reprisal to the Free City of Danzig could only lead to an aggravation of Polish-German relations. He also drew Lubomirski's attention to the recently imposed tariff duties on Danzig exports, stating that the responsibility for the economic consequences to the Danzig population would fall entirely on Poland.<sup>95</sup> This marked the first time the Reich Government had intervened directly in Polish-Danzig affairs. The Polish reply was voiced by Under Secretary of State Arciszewski to von Wühlisch, the German Charge in Warsaw.

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92. Polish White Book, p. 94.

93. Ibid., p. 95.

94. Lee, pp. 402f.

95. Polish White Book, p. 95.

With a certain brave arrogance, Arciszewski declared that the Polish Government failed to see any legal basis that would justify the intervention of Germany in Polish-Danzig relations. He vowed that, in the future, Poland would react to any attempt on the part of the Free City's authorities to compromise her rights and interests. Finally, the Polish diplomat warned the German representative that Poland regarded any eventual intervention by Germany detrimental to Polish rights and interests as an act of aggression.<sup>96</sup>

By this time, Germany was no longer represented in Warsaw by a diplomat of ambassadorial rank. Von Moltke had been recalled earlier. On August 9, in an unsigned memorandum for von Weizsäcker, the Reich Foreign Minister ordered that the former Ambassador to Poland remain in Berlin until further notice, incommunicado with either his embassy in Warsaw or any Polish authority. Von Ribbentrop also prohibited the Wilhelmstrasse from establishing contact with Poland on any level. The German Embassy in Warsaw was to remain silent on von Moltke's continued stay in Berlin as well as to confine itself exclusively to sending communications of an informative character to the Foreign Ministry.<sup>97</sup> On August 16, von Moltke requested the State Secretary, von Weizsäcker, to allow his return to his post. The captive Ambassador pleaded that the critical political situation necessitated his presence in Poland to give moral support to the German minority.<sup>98</sup> The request was ignored.

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96. Ibid., pp. 96f.

97. United States Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Washington, 1956) Series D, Vol. VII, p. 1f.

98. Ibid., p. 93.

While the Polish-Danzig customs dispute raged at the beginning of August, support for a compromise partition of the Free City came from surprising circles. On August 7, Pietro Arone, the Italian Ambassador to Poland, reported to his Foreign Minister, Ciano, about a partition plan similar in detail to the plan once considered by the Polish Foreign Ministry. Arone suggested dividing the Free State at the Mottlau river with the city of Danzig and the territory between the Mottlau and East Prussia going to Germany. Poland would retain the Westerplatte and acquire the area west of the river. According to Arone, the plan was drawn up by a pro-German follower of Pilsudski named Wladyslaw Studnicki. The Italian Ambassador considered Studnicki's proposal a discreet feeler from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accordingly, he asked and received permission from Ciano to investigate the plan's possibilities further. At the Ambassador's request, Monsignor Cortesi, the Papal Nuncio in Warsaw, suggested a compromise of the Danzig question to both Beck and Arciszewski. The Poles, though not denying the possibility of negotiating a peaceful solution, regarded the Monsignor's suggestion with reserve. Studnicki, however, had given Arone a detailed memorandum of his partition proposal. The Italian sent it by special courier to Ciano at Salzburg where the Foreign Minister conferred with Hitler and von Ribbentrop from August 11 to August 13.<sup>99</sup> If Ciano had entertained hopes of averting war over Danzig, he saw those hopes dashed at the Reich Foreign Minister's estate at Fuschl, outside Salzburg.

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99. Weinberg, "A Proposed Compromise Over Danzig in 1939?" pp. 337f.

For some ten hours on August 11, Ciano and von Ribbentrop discussed the European political situation. The German Foreign Minister told his Italian counterpart that the decision to fight was "implacable." He pointedly rejected any solution which would give satisfaction to Germany and avoid a struggle. Ciano felt that von Ribbentrop's attitude even precluded conceding more to the Germans than they asked for. He lamented that Germans were possessed by the "demon of destruction."<sup>100</sup> And so Studnicki's plan, as well as Arone's best efforts, came to a quick end. In fact, von Ribbentrop had bet Ciano a collection of old German armor against an Italian painting that in the event of war with Poland, France and Britain would remain neutral. During dinner at the White Horse Inn at St. Wolfgang, the Italian Foreign Minister found the atmosphere cold and gloomy. In the course of the entire meal, neither statesman spoke to the other.<sup>101</sup>

Ciano moved on to Obersalzberg the next day. There Hitler met with him on August 12 and August 13. The Führer also affirmed the German belief that Britain and France would not fight. Though Hitler's cordiality exceeded von Ribbentrop's, his determination to go to war was as unshakeable. When Ciano sought to ascertain the date of the planned attack on Poland, his host indicated that the autumn rains would force a settlement with Poland by the end of August. Towards the end of Ciano's second interview with Hitler, a messenger arrived with the news that Moscow had agreed to receive a German

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100. Ciano, The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943, p. 119.

101. Shirer, pp. 680f.

political negotiator.<sup>102</sup> The Führer would shortly present Europe with yet another surprise.

On August 15, von Weizsäcker, echoing Hitler's and von Ribbentrop's sentiments, told British Ambassador Sir Neville Henderson that the German Government could not believe that Britain would fight under all circumstances, whatever folly the Poles might commit. Henderson replied that if the Poles were compelled by any German act to resort to arms in self-defense, Britain would give them her full support. The State Secretary received Henderson's declaration with detachment and calm. He appeared confident that Russian assistance to Poland would not only be negligible, but that Soviets would, in the end, join in the Polish spoils.<sup>103</sup>

The German belief that Britain and France would not enter a war over Poland had deep roots. Von Ribbentrop had consistently maintained that, if Germany and Russia were to reach an agreement, Britain and France would never dare to fight on Poland's account. By April, he had succeeded in bringing Hitler around to this view. Consequently the Germans stood ready to purchase Russian neutrality or collaboration and thus insure the isolation of Poland and the success of "Operation White."<sup>104</sup> The West did not view Litvinov's dismissal as a potential signal of a shift in Russian policy. The Western Powers continued to negotiate with Moscow from May to August in the hope of forming a coalition against Berlin. On May 14, Beck had

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102. Ibid., pp. 681f.

103. British War Blue Book, pp. 115ff.

104. Wheeler-Bennett, pp. 405f.

indicated that in his opinion Polish participation in a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union would definitely provoke a German attack. He did not consider at the time the possibility of a German-Soviet rapprochement, for Potemkin had assured him on May 10 that such an event was impossible.<sup>105</sup> The Polish Foreign Minister was once again the victim of duplicity.

On May 30, von Weizsäcker met with the Russian Chargé in Berlin, Georgi Astakhov. As a result of this conversation, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, the German Ambassador to the Soviet Union, was instructed to probe Moscow's attitude. Von der Schulenburg, significantly, belonged to the von Seeckt and von Brockdorff-Rantzau school during the days of the Weimar Republic. This group firmly believed in a German-Soviet rapprochement and had brought it about at Rapallo. He took his charge seriously and labored to restore the once close relations which existed between the two countries. Suddenly on June 29, the Führer experienced another of his changes of heart as he ordered the discontinuation of the German-Soviet talks.<sup>106</sup> The next initiative came from the Russians and trade negotiations resumed in Berlin on July 22. French and British approval of Russia's proposal for military staff talks increased the frenzy of German démarches to Moscow. In a series of conversations between German and Soviet representatives both in Moscow and Berlin on August 3, the Germans exposed their desire for an agreement.<sup>107</sup>

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105. Debicki, p. 149.

106. Shirer, pp. 659ff.

107. Ibid., pp. 668ff.

Then on August 12, Hitler received that fateful telegram at Obersalz-  
burg. On August 14, von der Schulenburg was sent a telegram from  
von Ribbentrop instructing the German Ambassador to read it verbatim  
to Molotov. The telegram contained Hitler's bid for rapprochement.  
In a move calculated to impress the suspicious Russians, von Ribben-  
trop offered to travel to Moscow to conclude an agreement. Von der  
Schulenburg was furthermore directed to insure that this latest dé-  
marche reach Stalin's ears in as exact a form as possible. For, in  
effect, the Germans were outbidding Great Britain and France. The  
Reich Foreign Minister spoke of his intention to discuss with the  
Russian dictator the necessity of "jointly clarifying the territor-  
ial questions of Eastern Europe."<sup>108</sup> In this obvious hint of another  
partition of Poland, von Ribbentrop was bludgeoning the Russians  
with subtlety. Between August 15 and August 21, German-Soviet talks  
went on in earnest. A trade agreement was concluded on August 18  
in Berlin. On August 19, von der Schulenburg wired the Wilhelmstrasse  
that the Soviets had agreed to von Ribbentrop's coming to Moscow to  
negotiate a nonaggression pact. On August 23, the Reich Foreign  
Minister arrived in Moscow and that evening a nonaggression pact  
as well as a secret protocol delimiting mutual spheres of interest  
in Eastern Europe were signed.<sup>109</sup> Perfidy had triumphed in Moscow.  
Josef Stalin's greatest maligner had become his greatest friend.

Yet Beck still did not realize the import of recent events. He  
professed to believe that this development, which in reality demol-

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108. Ibid., pp. 685ff.

109. Ibid., pp. 694ff.



ished what remained of his policy of balance, did not really change the world situation. For Poland's wary attitude toward the Soviet Union had been vindicated; the Russians had been playing a double game for some time. The German-Soviet treaty was simply the counterpart of the Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Beck did not expect, consequently, any anti-Polish turn in Soviet foreign policy. His major concern lay with the reaction of British and French public opinion to the news from Moscow.<sup>110</sup> Beck's diplomacy of self-delusion had reached its apex.

In Danzig, during the month preceding the assault on Poland, the normal diplomatic channels were circumvented by the personal visits of Gauleiter Forster to his friend Hitler and by von Ribbentrop's assignment of special envoy, Edmund Veesenmayer, to Forster's office. The German Counsel General, Martin von Janson, found the Gauleiter disrespectful and uncommunicative. Even the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle had little success in curbing Forster, who felt free to countermand orders.<sup>111</sup> The German Foreign Service also had lost control of the activities of German nationals in Poland. On August 18, the Chargé in Warsaw, von Wühlisch, urgently requested the Wilhelmstrasse to curtail the intrigues of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle in the interest of the German national group. Von Wühlisch was disturbed by the recent arrests of Nazi activists in Upper Silesia and warned of impending arrests in Poznan, Pommer-

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110. Budurowycz, pp. 166f.

111. Brown, "The Third Reich's Mobilization of the German Fifth Column in Eastern Europe," p. 139.

ellen, and central Poland.<sup>112</sup>

On August 22, Neville Chamberlain addressed a letter to Hitler stressing that the British Government was determined to fulfill its obligations to Poland. The British Prime Minister promised to discuss all problems affecting the two countries, given the creation of a peace atmosphere. During such a truce period, Britain would welcome direct negotiations between Poland and Germany in regard to minorities.<sup>113</sup> When Ambassador Henderson delivered Chamberlain's message, Hitler betrayed bitterness toward Great Britain. Furthermore, he belligerently declared himself ready to assume the risk of British intervention on behalf of Poland in the event Germany found it necessary to initiate hostilities against that country.<sup>114</sup>

Danzig, however, continued to divert Poland's attention. On August 24, the Free City's Senate, in direct violation of the Danzig Constitution, named Albert Forster the head of state. In this affront, the Senate flung a brazen challenge into the face of the League of Nations, Poland, and the Western Powers. The usual strong protests on the part of the Polish Government were ignored. Meanwhile, the Free City's Administration watched passively as Polish rights were flagrantly violated. The Nazis confiscated stocks of merchandise, took over control of the railway, and arrested Poles at random, even members of a special negotiating team. On August 25, the German battleship "Schleswig-Holstein" arrived in port and

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112. DGFP, Series D, Vol. VII, p. 117.

113. British War Blue Book, pp. 125ff.

114. Lee, p. 403.

trained her guns on the Polish military installation at Westerplatte.<sup>115</sup>

An Anglo-Polish mutual assistance pact was finally consummated on August 25. Signed by Viscount Halifax and Count Raczynski, the pact pledged each party to support the other in the event of hostilities. The agreement was to remain in force for a period of five years.<sup>116</sup> A secret protocol limited the definition of a dangerous European power to Germany and listed the areas in which the two governments had particular interests. Warsaw considered this treaty as an offsetting lever to the Berlin-Moscow Agreement. The full power of the British Empire was now committed to Poland's defense.<sup>117</sup> In terms of a system of countervailing alliances, this new agreement balanced the score. In terms of military hardware and logistical capability, the Anglo-Polish Pact hardly gave Poland a fighting chance. It merely induced Hitler to postpone his attack for four days.

On August 24, Beck had instructed Lipski to meet with von Weizsacker to clarify the conflicting issues between the two countries. The State Secretary was simply unavailable. The Polish Ambassador did manage to see Goring that day. The Reichsmarschall, friendly as always, suggested that the Danzig question and other controversies would not have reached the critical stage were it not for the Anglo-Polish alliance. He repeatedly insinuated that Polish

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115. Debicki, p. 157.

116. British War Blue Book, pp. 49ff.

117. Debicki, p. 155.

hopes for tangible British aid would crumble into a costly sin of presumption.<sup>118</sup>

Diplomatic attempts to breach the impasse and prevent the impending conflict increased in number and frenzy. On August 28, Sir Howard Kennard inquired whether Beck would agree to direct negotiations with the German Government. Since the Germans had refused to deal with Polish diplomats directly, Beck communicated an affirmative answer to the British Government which had assumed the rôle of mediator.<sup>119</sup> That day Henderson took up the subject of direct Polish-German negotiations and an international guarantee of the resulting agreement with Hitler. The Führer promised a written reply the next day.

While the world waited nervously for Hitler's reply to the latest British peace initiative, the Poles became increasingly alarmed at German troop movements along their frontiers. On August 29, Szembek summoned Kennard and Noël to inform them that President Moscicki had decreed a general mobilization. Count Szembek explained that the Polish action was prompted by the German entry into Slovakia, the increase of provocative incidents in Danzig, and German troop concentrations on Polish frontiers. In response to British protests that a mobilization would jeopardize the Anglo-German negotiations still in progress, the Poles agreed to delay a public announcement of the mobilization for several hours.<sup>120</sup> Polish sus-

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118. Ibid., p. 157.

119. Polish White Book, pp. 106f.

120. Ibid., p. 108.

pitions of a German surprise attack had heightened after August 26. In two cases, orders revoking the planned assault of August 26 had not reached German units in time. An infantry attack from Slovakia on the Jablonkow Pass in the Carpathian Mountains and the occupation of the Polish Consulate in Kwidzyn, East Prussia, portended German treachery. And the Polish General Staff chafed in the knowledge that a delay in mobilization meant the absence of ten Polish divisions from the battlefield.<sup>121</sup>

Henderson met with Hitler and von Ribbentrop again on August 29. The German reply held out hope only for the most incorrigible optimist. Although the Führer agreed to British mediation and direct negotiations with Poland, he stepped up his demands and insisted that a Polish plenipotentiary arrive in Berlin the next day. The German note handed to Henderson mendaciously catalogued Poland's alleged provocations.<sup>122</sup> The preposterous nature of these demands cast a deeper gloom on the already frantic British. As Kennard observed in a telegram to Halifax on August 30: "I feel sure that it would be impossible to induce the Polish Government to send M. Beck or any other representative to Berlin to discuss a settlement on the basis proposed by Herr Hitler. They would certainly sooner fight and perish rather than submit to such humiliation . . ."<sup>123</sup>

At midnight on August 30, Henderson handed the British reply to Hitler's demands to the Reich Foreign Minister. It suggested

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121. Debicki, pp. 156ff.

122. Ibid., p. 159.

123. British War Blue Book, p. 181.

that von Ribbentrop communicate the Führer's proposals to the Polish Ambassador for transmission to Warsaw. Von Ribbentrop arrogantly answered by reading a lengthy document, constituting in sixteen points Hitler's proposals, at top speed in German. Henderson was not even able accurately to record the demands. When the British Ambassador asked for a text of the statement, von Ribbentrop refused indicating that the absence of a Polish plenipotentiary precluded a solution at this juncture.<sup>124</sup> Henderson immediately contacted Lipski, urging the latter to request an interview with the German Foreign Minister. Beck, after hearing similar remonstrances from the British and French Ambassadors in Warsaw, instructed Lipski to comply with Henderson's suggestion. The Polish Ambassador was received by von Ribbentrop at six-thirty in the evening on August 31. Since Lipski had not been designated a plenipotentiary, the Foreign Minister did not present him with any German proposals.<sup>125</sup> At nine o'clock that evening, a German broadcast accused the Poles of rejecting a peace initiative which had never been communicated to the Polish Government. If the Polish Foreign Ministry listened to the German broadcast, they heard Hitler's sixteen points for the first time.

At four forty-five in the morning of September 1, Germany attacked Poland. The pretext for this assault was self-defense. Hitler had found it necessary to resort to duplicity to start his war. The alleged Polish strike on German territory occurred on the even-

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124. Ibid., pp. 187ff.

125. Debicki, pp. 161f.

ing of August 31, when thirteen condemned criminals, dressed in Polish uniforms, were given fatal injections by a German doctor and then were shot. Their bodies, strewn around the radio station at Gleiwitz just outside the Polish border, were to indicate that Poland had provoked hostilities.<sup>126</sup> The paroxysm that shook Europe had begun just as the Polish-German romance was ending at last.

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126. Shirer, p. 693.

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