

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

GERMAN ADHERENCE TO INTERNATIONAL LAW DURING WORLD WAR II  
THE CASES OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, POLAND, AND FRANCE

ZANE DILTS  
SPRING 2019

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in Political Science  
with honors in Political Science

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

John King Gamble  
Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Law  
Thesis Supervisor

Robert Speel  
Associate Professor of Political Science  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College

## ABSTRACT

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis turned Germany into a country devoid of the rule of law. One would expect this lawlessness to extend to international law. However, this is an oversimplification. The Third Reich appeared to respect international *jus ad bellum* laws, going to great lengths to offer a fig leaf to the international community prior to their invasions of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France. However, the nature of Germany's occupation of these countries undoubtedly violated the international legal rules of occupation stated in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. At the same time, there are numerous instances of German circumvention of these rules. International law before World War II largely lacked nuance, thus allowing Germany and other belligerent states to appear to be in adherence, while usually transgressing the original intent. I dealt extensively with these breaches of international law committed by the Third Reich in their invasions of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France, highlighting the limitations of pre-World War II international law as codified in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the entirety of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Behrend College for their guidance throughout my collegiate career. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. John Gamble. Without his mentorship and motivation this thesis would not be possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Speel, who gave invaluable insight as a second reader. Finally, I would like to thank Ruth Pflueger for going above and beyond in aiding me achieve international experience, which has narrowed the focus of my studies.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Hitler's reign as Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945 brought incalculable suffering to Europe. After the supposed "War to End All Wars" concluded in 1918, a conflict of the same scale happening again was thought to be impossible. International organizations such as the League of Nations, an enormous leap forward for the era, were formed in order to achieve global peace, yet it did not last. The horror of World War I was dwarfed by that which occurred during World War II. After the war, significant advances were made in international law and global cooperation. The United Nations succeeded and surpassed in scope the now-defunct League of Nations, war crime trials such as those at Nuremberg changed how the international community addressed crimes against humanity, and the European Coal and Steel Community planted the seed of what has become the world's most ambitious political experiment in the European Union. International law failed to prevent the Second World War, but it was still a body that world leaders respected. An individual as despicable as Hitler, who had virtually no respect for the rule of law, still in some contexts went to great lengths to appear to abide by international law. This thesis will study Hitler and Nazi Germany's respect or lack thereof for international law in the invasions and subsequent occupations of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France.

#### *The International Rules of Occupation*

The international rules of occupation at the time of the Second World War were largely influenced by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. Of particular importance to this thesis is Section III. This Convention deals with an extensive array of international laws regarding war, including those that address the issue of belligerent occupation. The treaty defines occupation as,

“Territory...actually placed under the authority of the hostile army...the occupation applies only to the territory where such authority is established, and in a position to assert itself” (Hague Conventions, 1907). Furthermore, Article 43 provides general guideline for occupying states, stating, “The authority of the legitimate power having actually passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all steps in his power to re-establish and insure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country” (Hague).

Subsequent articles outlaw compulsory military service (Article 44), the disrespecting of individual lives, private property, and religion (Article 46), and the taking of cash, funds, and property not strictly belonging to the State (Article 53) (Hague). The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the Nazi invasion and occupancy of three states – Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France – during World War II. When asking the question of whether or not the Germans abided by international rules of occupation, or the understanding of the rules, at the time, I shall examine those set out in the 1899 Hague Convention which were reaffirmed eight years later in the 1907 Hague Convention. These rules are most prominently found in Article III, Sections 42-56 of the 1899 Hague Conventions.

### ***The Laws of War***

Meaning “right to war”, *jus ad bellum* is an area of international law that outlines the conditions necessary for a state to have the “right” to go to war. Often coupled with *jus ad bellum* is *jus in bello*, or “right in war”. In the post-World War II era we are accustomed to a world order that regulates conflict. However, international law regulating war is a fairly new phenomenon, though gaining some traction in the 1930s and 40s. Traditionally, war was seen as a tool in a state’s diplomatic arsenal, a right that their sovereignty granted them (Janis 504). History provides a few much earlier examples, St Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and Hugo Grotius

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, arguing for a “just war” doctrine that would stabilize the chaos of war, though this was not widely accepted (Janis 504).

The carnage of World War I motivated the international community to attempt a workable mode to prevent war. With the rapidity with which World War I erupted likely on their mind, the League of Nations enacted a “cooling off period”, in which hostile states would “in no case resort to war until three months after [their grievances were heard by a judicial board]” (Janis 512-13). Furthermore, the stunningly idealistic Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 saw 31 states, including Germany, France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, renounce war “as an instrument of national policy” and agree that war would no longer serve as a “solution of international controversies” (Janis 512).

Some progress in regulating war was made in the inter-war years. However, it was essentially erased when World War II broke out. The horror of World War II would precipitate huge advances relative for the role of international law in world diplomacy. Several institutions, most conspicuously the United Nations – and its International Court of Justice for example – would act to safeguard against another conflict the same scale of the Second World War. However, for this reaction to be had, the horror had to first be experienced. The League of Nations, weakened by the American refusal to join, and Kellogg-Briand Pact were grand gestures, but their shortcomings became devastatingly clear.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Hitler, the Nazis, and International Law**

#### ***International Law in Nazi Germany***

Nearly a century later, Nazi Germany is still the exemplar of an oppressive regime. Hitler and the Nazis murdered, jailed, and silenced all they deemed to be undesirable. Personal liberties



and the rule of law were eliminated. These derogations extended to international law, although not to the extent that one might imagine. Nazi Germany disregarded international law in many cases, but it was not ignored entirely.

In many ways, Hitler needed international law, or at least the diplomacy that is a major component of that law. When war broke out, Germany was one of the most powerful militaries in world history. However, German supremacy was not achieved until the late 1930s. If war between France and Germany had occurred before 1938, Germany likely would have been defeated (Vagts 664). Hitler often spoke of peaceful relations with Europe and his intentions of adhering to German-signed treaties. These lies were likely for the sake of maintaining appearances with Europe so as to not provoke a premature conflict (Vagts 663-64). As Hitler's aggression grew with the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss* of Austria, and subsequent occupations, the German Foreign Ministry's workload increased. The agency, led by Friedrich Gaus, needed to justify Germany's acts, which often broke international laws such as those in the loathed Treaty of Versailles or rulings from the League of Nations' Permanent Court of International Justice (Vagts 668).

Hitler's confidence grew as he invaded European countries as World War II approached, facing little to no resistance from France, the United Kingdom, or the greater international community. His brazenness in violating international law grew accordingly. This can be seen in his handling of two similar instances, one in 1936 and another later in 1939. The former involved Berthold Jacob-Solomon, a German who defected to Switzerland. German agents crossed the border and seized Jacob, taking him back to Germany. When Switzerland threatened to pursue legal action against this violation, Hitler, fearing foreign repercussions, capitulated to the Swiss demands and returned him (Vagts 688). However, in 1939 with the war in progress, Hitler

reversed this policy and gave no consideration in returning British nationals taken in the Netherlands (Vagts 688).

Important to the Nazi jurisprudence and mindset was the concept of a state. Traditionally, a state requires a population, a territory, a government, and government-maintained sovereignty. The Nazis twisted this, arguing that a state was a race of people who needed to occupy a territory (Vagts 687). They viewed the traditional understanding as something man-made, or a *Gesellschaft*. Their desired *Gemeinschaft* contrasted this by being an “hereditary and organic” entity that is greater than the individuals who occupy it (Vagts 687). The Nazis coupled the *Gemeinschaft* with the idea of a *Volk*. A *Volk* was supposedly an “organic, natural entity” that necessitated the existence of a single community, the German Reich, with a single leader, Hitler (Vagts 687). The German Chancellor believed that the German *Volk* had been separated by artificial boundaries imposed by the international community. This belief was central to Hitler’s desire to reunite ethnic Germans across Europe into their racial home, the greater German Reich (Vagts 687-89). Further racial theories emerged in Nazi Germany, such as that of a *Lebensraum*, or “living space”. The Nazis viewed it their inherent, biological right to expand as far as they desired (Vagts 689). A separate but related theory, *Grossraum*, or “grand space”, promoted the idea that Germany, with their “superior” political idea, had the right to interfere with the operations of the “lesser” states under their control. The outrageousness of this policy included the belief that outside states had no right to interfere in Germany (Vagts 689). These theories provide insight into the Nazi attitude towards international law and help to explain their disdain for it. Though he would have preferred to ignore it entirely, Hitler needed the diplomatic procedures that are central to international law to forge alliances and ward off direct conflict. However, as the war continued, German diplomacy became almost irrelevant. Hitler no longer saw value in maintaining the pretense that Germany was respecting international law.

## Chapter 3

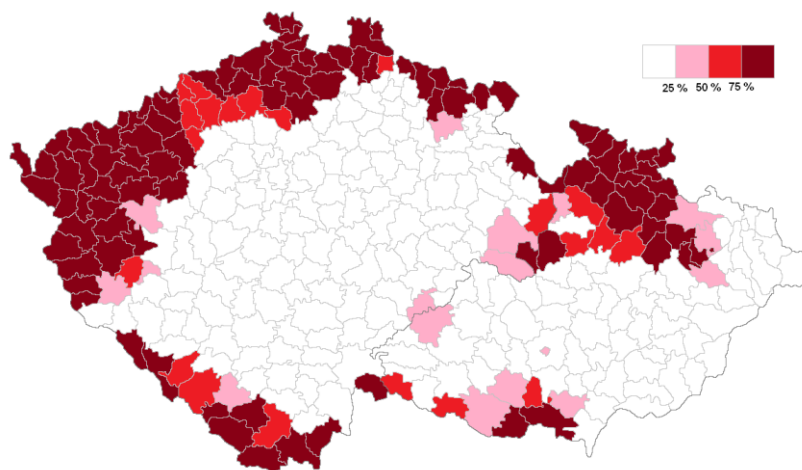
### The Case of Czechoslovakia

#### *Paving the Way for Invasion: Inter-War Czechoslovakia*

The First World War brought immense change to the landscape of Europe. Once the second-largest in Europe, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved after its defeat by the Allied Powers. From its ashes came the formation of several countries, including Czechoslovakia (“Redrawing the Map”). Located in the northern, western, and southern regions of this new nation were ethnic Germans known as German Bohemians, and later as Sudeten Germans. These individuals made up a sizeable portion, around one-fourth, of the new Czechoslovak region, with over 3,000,000 living in the foothills of the Sudeten Mountains (“Sudetenland”). Figure 1 shows the concentration of ethnic Germans within Czechoslovakia, displaying the percentage of the population that was comprised of them.

The so-called Sudetenland was contentious from the moment it became controlled by Czechoslovakia under the Treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919.

Sudeten Germans felt as though they were treated as second-class when compared to “mainland” Czechs, often claiming ethnic discrimination at the hands of Czech officials (“Sudetenland”). This discrimination would later be used by Hitler as justification for invading the Sudetenland. Feeling abandoned and isolated by the government imposed on them, they began to welcome the ever-growing embrace of their German neighbors to the west. The dissolution of the Austro-



*Figure 1 (“The Percentage”)*

Hungarian Empire harshly affected the economy of the new Czechoslovakia. Once a major export destination for Czechoslovak goods and services, Austria and Hungary saw that prominence drop sharply in the inter-war period. In 1920, about 44.2% of Czechoslovak exports went to the two countries. By 1937, that number would drop to 9.2% (Daniels 145). Germany jumped at the opportunity that the transitioning economy of Czechoslovakia created, deepening their economic involvement. The share of Czechoslovak exports to Germany rose from 12.7% in 1920 to 26.8% in 1928. German exports to Czechoslovakia also rose drastically during this period, growing from 24% to 38.6% (Daniels 145). The “roaring twenties” saw Czechoslovakia and Germany becoming more and more woven together, with trading partners in Europe that could match the scale of Germany hard to find. Those in the Sudetenland were at the forefront of this integration. Conditions of Czechoslovakia were worsened by the Great Depression, which ravaged the highly-industrial economy of the Sudetenland. Industrial production, a main economic sector of the region, saw a decline of over 40% from 1930-35 (Daniels 145).

Just as poor economic conditions in Germany led to the population’s acceptance of the fascism of Hitler and the Nazis, the worsening situation of the Sudeten Germans coincided with an embrace of Nazi Germany. Increasing Nazi sympathies led to the formation of the *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront* in October of 1933, which would eventually become the Sudeten German Party (SdP). The party’s leader, Konrad Henlein, argued for a full embrace of Nazi Germany and a break-up of Czechoslovakia, returning the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia’s over 3,000,000 ethnic Germans to German control. Unsurprisingly, the party was partly funded by the German Nazis (“Sudetenland”). What was a surprise, however, was just how well the SdP fared in the parliamentary elections of 1935. The party won approximately 15% in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, earning 1,092,255 and 1,249,530 votes, respectively (Tóth 132). This turned the Sudeten German Party into the largest party in Czechoslovakia in terms of

vote-share. However, due to electoral intricacies, the mainstream Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants, ended up with the mandate in the Chamber, but tying seat-wise in the Senate (Tóth 131-32). The conditions in Czechoslovakia – a sizable ethnic German population, what amounted to a *de facto* Nazi puppet party with considerable power, and close economic ties to Germany – led to a perfect storm in which Hitler could achieve a long-held goal of returning the Sudetenland to German control.

### ***The Sudeten Crisis***

Fueled by the success of the Nazi *Anschluss* of Austria in March of 1938, Hitler began to focus his efforts on acquiring the Sudetenland. Hitler and Henlein met in the same month to discuss how to proceed. At this meeting, Henlein was instructed by Hitler to demand concessions from the Czechoslovak government they could not possibly grant (Frend 122). Hitler wanted to create an illusion of good faith diplomacy to justify his eventual use of force as a “last resort”. He later publicly supported the demands of Konrad Henlein and the SdP expressed in the so-called “Karlsbad programme”. These included the “restoration of complete equality of the German national group with the Czech people” and a build-up of Sudeten German self-government in all realms of public life, as well as general Sudeten autonomy (“The Eight Demands”). Reacting to the growing possibility of a German act of aggression against the Sudetenland and greater Czechoslovakia as a whole, Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš called up a class of Czechoslovak reservists (Frend 123). This move deeply angered Hitler, who was quoted at the time as saying, “It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future” (Frend 123). A military conflict between Czechoslovakia and Germany needed to be avoided at all costs in the eyes of Europe (i.e. Britain and France). With the “War to End All Wars” still fresh in the mind of Europeans, they believed a Czechoslovak-German war would be the start of another international conflict. The United Kingdom began to

pressure President Beneš to accept the terms demanded in the Karlsbad programme. Part of this diplomatic pressure came in the summer of 1938 with the UK's "Runciman Mission". This diplomatic envoy headed by British mediator Lord Walter Runciman aimed to convince Beneš to concede to Henlein's demand, however it failed. A solution continued to evade the parties involved, with tensions escalating throughout the rest of the summer. Hitler began to heat up his rhetoric about the plights of the Sudeten Germans, claiming that they faced unprecedented discrimination for their German ethnicity and arguing for Sudeten secession. At a Nuremberg rally on September 12<sup>th</sup>, the German Chancellor claimed, "The misery of the Sudeten Germans defies description. [The Czechoslovak government] desires to destroy them. In a humanitarian context, they are being oppressed and humiliated in an unprecedented fashion" ("Herr Hitler's Speech"). By the end of the month, European appeasement of Hitler would be attempted.

### ***The Munich Agreement: "There Will Be Peace"***

Given Hitler's continued inflammatory remarks regarding the Sudetenland, such as the speech given in Nuremberg on September 12<sup>th</sup>, Europe feared that war on the continent was encroaching. A first proposal, written by the British, stipulated that all areas comprised of 50% or more ethnic Germans would be controlled by Germany ("Munich Agreement"). For obvious reasons, Czechoslovakia did not agree with this, but eventually capitulated under the weight of diplomatic pressure. Hitler wanted more from the agreement, raising his demands to full German occupation of the Sudetenland. As a result, the French and Czechoslovaks both began to mobilize their forces. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain rightfully felt that the parties were on the brink of war and, in a last-ditch effort, called for another conference. Hitler had promised that German troops would march on the Sudetenland by October 1<sup>st</sup>, a deal was reached on September 29<sup>th</sup> ("Munich Agreement").

The Munich Agreement, or Munich Betrayal as it is known, is now known principally as an example of how appeasement policies can fail. However, at the time it was viewed as a monumental success. Europe went from being on the brink of war to obtaining what Chamberlain famously touted as “peace for our time” (“1938: Chamberlain”). The Munich Agreement gave Hitler control over the Sudetenland in exchange for assurances that Germany would not pursue any further territorial expansions. It all but destroyed Czechoslovakia. Aside from losing the Sudetenland, the country was soon forced to concede areas to Poland, who jumped at the opportunity to strike on the weakened Czechoslovakia. Losing the Sudeten Mountains made it impossible to defend their frontiers. Furthermore, Slovakia was granted full autonomy, creating a federal state, and changing the spelling of the country’s name to “Czechoslovakia”, though for the sake of consistency this thesis will continue to refer to the country as “Czechoslovakia” (Winks 220-21). Czechoslovakia also lost significant sectors of their economy, with 66% of its coal, 70% of its iron and steel, and 70% of its electric power disappearing with the signing of the Munich Agreement (Shirer 422).

### ***The Disintegration of Czechoslovakia***

Before Munich, Hitler often said that his only goal was rejoining the Sudeten Germans with the greater German Reich, uniting his desired *Volksgemeinschaft*. In a Berlin speech on September 26, 1936, mere days before the signing of the Munich Agreement, Hitler proclaimed that the Sudetenland was his “last territorial demand in Europe” (“This Is My Last”). It should come as no surprise that this was never the true intention of Hitler. A Nazi plan to invade Czechoslovakia, codenamed “Case Green”, was drawn up as early as June 1937. After the fall of Austria these plans needed to be updated and implemented. A proposed route to take in this was to prop up an anti-German protest in Czechoslovakia where a German minister would be murdered, thus “provoking” Germany into action (Shirer 357). Hitler never wanted a healthy

Czechoslovakia to exist, telling the Hungarian Prime Minister in September of 1938 that, “to destroy Czechoslovakia...[would] provide the only satisfactory solution” (Shirer 427).

Mere days after Munich, Hitler began to set in motion the invasion of greater Czechoslovakia. Nazi documents in late 1938 show plans and guidelines on how the soon-to-come invasion should be undertaken (Shirer 438). The Nazis expected there to be “no resistance worth mentioning” and stressed the importance that the invasion “clearly appear [to be] a peaceful action and not a warlike undertaking” (Shirer 438). Though Hitler blatantly broke international law often, the Munich Agreement being a shining example, he cared deeply about the outward appearances of German actions. This is evident in the aforementioned directive on invasion rules, as well as in the meeting between Hitler and then Czechoslovak President Emil Hácha that took place in the early hours of March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1939. Hácha was not a skilled politician, which worked to Hitler’s advantage. The German Chancellor hoped to convince the Czechoslovak President to accept his extremely unagreeable terms. It was at this meeting that Hitler informed Hácha that the order had been given to the *Wehrmacht* to invade Czechoslovakia at 6:00 that morning. Hitler gave Hácha two options – be defeated by force or accept their fate peacefully. The Czechoslovak president, now overwhelmed at his current situation to the point of fainting, chose the latter (Shirer 446-47). German troops met no resistance when they marched into Czechoslovakia on the morning of March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1939. The next day, Hitler established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, a puppet government completely under the wing of Germany.

Establishing the Protectorate, Hitler ensured that Czechoslovakia would be added to the eastern expansion of his *Lebensraum*. He still wanted to maintain appearances, however, and chose Konstantin von Neurath, a high-ranking Nazi considered to be moderate by Nazi standards, as the leader, or *Reichsprotektor*, of the new Protectorate (Shirer 448). This, in Hitler’s



words, was done to convince Britain and France that he “did not wish to carry on a policy hostile to Czechoslovakia” (Shirer 448). Whether from being fooled by Hitler’s scheming or from fear of conflict, neither Britain nor France came to the immediate aid of Czechoslovakia. They did, however, make formal protests a few days later after domestic public outrage. The British criticized the German actions as lacking any shred of legality and the French, taking a less harsh tone, said they “would not recognize the legality of the German occupation” (Shirer 452-53). With the invasion of Czechoslovakia beyond Hitler’s “last demand” of the Sudetenland, the possibility of peace with the Third Reich had been removed.

### ***German-Controlled Czechoslovakia***

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Hitler released a decree concerning the new Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and outlining how it would be governed. In it, he justified the German taking of Czechoslovakia as an act of German self-preservation, with the preamble stating, “[Occupying the Sudetenland] is therefore only an act of compliance with the law of self-preservation if the German Reich is resolved to take decisive action for the reestablishment of the foundations of a Central European Order ... [the German Reich] alone is chosen by virtue of its greatness and the qualities of the German people to solve this problem” (“Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression”). The decree then goes on to provide details about the governmental structure of the Protectorate, which consisted of two central authorities located in Prague – the German Reich Protector and the Czech Government of the Protectorate. With Hácha accepting Hitler’s demands, he was allowed to remain as State President of Czechoslovakia, controlling the Government of the Protectorate. However, this position was awarded no real power and, instead, the *Reichsprotector* Konstantin von Neurath was the *de facto* leader of Nazi Czechoslovakia (Lemkin 134). Technically, these two administrations each had their own jurisdictions. The German Protector handled issues of general administration and citizenship throughout 19

prefects in Bohemia and Moravia. At the same time the Czech Government had power through local Czech authorities. However, in reality the German Protector had the ability to override the Czech Protectors at any turn, thus leaving the latter little more than a puppet (Lemkin 135). Furthermore, the autonomy of the Czech Government was greatly reduced. The Reich had the ability to change the structure of the Czech autonomous region in any way its agents deemed fit. This was expanded upon in a separate decree issued roughly three years later in May of 1942, which gave the Reich Protector power to undertake measures to further limit the autonomy of the Protectorate (Lemkin 135).

The formation of the Protectorate created questions regarding citizenship of those living under it. In general, ethnic Germans living in Czechoslovakia, or *Volksdeutsche*, were treated much better than their Czech counterparts. They were given the “benefits” of German citizenship, such as the right to be extradited and tried in German courts, as well as Czech citizenship under the Protectorate (Lemkin 135-38). The Czechoslovak government was also forced to pay reparations to ethnic Germans for the “harms” that were committed against them, harms that were grossly exaggerated. The Germans’ Czech citizenship brought with it none of the obligations that ethnic Czechs were forced to adhere to. On the other hand, individuals who were only citizens of the Protectorate were harshly discriminated against. Those in this group who happened to be living outside of the newly-formed Protectorate were forced to immediately return or else forfeit all their belongings “for the benefit of the Reich” (Lemkin 135-36).

A body blow to the health of Czechoslovakia came in the form of the Nazi control of industries, trade, and occupation. Aside from returning Sudeten Germans to his dreamed-of *Volksgemeinschaft*, Hitler and the Nazis saw great economic potential in Czechoslovakia, given its abundance of natural resources and the high level of industrialization in areas under the Protectorate. A series of decrees in the latter half of 1939 paved the way for the Nazis to control

the economy, with the organization of twenty-three economic sectors, such as lumber, textile, and metal production (Lemkin 136). Those who previously worked in and/or owned businesses that dealt with these sectors now had to adhere to strict rules laid down by the Nazis on the selling of these goods. Furthermore, the Nazis had the power to deny Czechs the right to trade in or pursue occupations that they desired (Lemkin 136-37).

It is impossible to properly discuss the harms done by Nazi Germany without discussing the sheer horror that consumed the lives of Jews in Europe during World War II. Czechoslovak Jews were not spared from this terror. The Jewish community in Czechoslovakia was forced to register their property and eventually were banned from any involvement in the economy at all (Lemkin 138). After taking the Sudetenland in 1938, 20,000 Czechoslovak Jews were murdered. As a result of the Holocaust, 263,000 Jews residing in the territory of Czechoslovakia lost their lives (“The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia”).

### ***German Adherence to International Law***

In the case of Czechoslovakia, violence did not break out. President Hácha, under the threat of German devastation, allowed the German invasion. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that Hitler violated the laws of *jus ad bellum*. War, though certainly promised by Hitler, did not actually occur. Technically, no “right to war” laws were broken. This situation is one of many that exposed the limitations of international law during World War II. Furthermore, the Munich Agreement legitimized Hitler’s stranglehold on the Sudetenland. France and the United Kingdom capitulated on this taking, with the League of Nations giving no opinion (Simkin). Hitler seemed eager to use international law to justify Germany’s acts. However, once a country had been invaded, this interest waned.

Perhaps the aspect of the 1899 Hague Conventions most harshly violated by the Germans during the occupation of Czechoslovakia was Article 46, which reads, “Family honors and rights,

individual lives and private property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated” (Hague Conventions, 1907). Virtually every part of this was disregarded. “Family honors and rights” is a vague statement and, therefore, difficult to decide what exactly needs respected. Belgian Prime Minister Auguste Beernaert raised concerns over this lack of precision during the agreement’s writing. However, these concerns ultimately went unaddressed (Inal 63-64). For example, rape, a clear violation of human rights, was not explicitly forbidden. These ambiguities make it difficult to decide what exactly are violations of the rules. Forcefully separating families, taking small children, and giving them to Nazi families is most-assuredly a disrespect of “family rights and honor”. The Lidice Massacre is a prime example. Lidice, a village in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, was obliterated by the Germans in June of 1942 as retaliation for the killing of a high-ranking Nazi. All of the village’s adult males, which numbered at 173, were murdered, with 184 women and 88 children being deported to concentration camps (“The Massacre”).

There was also clear disrespect of “religious convictions and liberty”. Czechoslovak Jews were murdered, denied employment, and imprisoned solely due to their faith. German soldiers and officials would murder over 80% of the Czechoslovak Jewish population by 1945 (“The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia”). By forcing expatriate Czechs either to return to their now-oppressed country or forfeit their belongings, personal property was confiscated and disrespected.

Article 44, which prohibits compulsory military service of an occupied population “against its own country”, was violated in the German occupation (Hague). The Sudetenland was annexed by Germany and incorporated into the German Reich, granting ethnically German Czechs in the area German citizenship. With this came the obligation of conscription into the German military. Technically no longer Czechs but Germans, these individuals were forced to

fight or else face harsh punishment. Furthermore, with war never breaking out in Czechoslovakia, these individuals did not have to fight against their own compatriots (Nigel). Another complicated situation was when the Czech Government Army in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or *vládní vojsko*, was essentially forced to deploy to the Italian Front, though these soldiers were not forcefully conscripted (Nigel). The instances of military conscription enacted in occupied Czechoslovakia likely violated what the writers of the Hague Convention intended to prohibit. However, the language of the laws did not meaningfully address the nuanced Czechoslovak situation.

The Germans forced Czechs who wished to leave their country to pay a so-called “emigration tax” (Lemkin 137). This act simultaneously violated Articles 49 and 51, which outlaw new taxes for non-military purposes and force taxes to adhere with “the rules in existence”, respectively (Hague). Furthermore, a policy of collective punishment was often carried out, blatantly violating Article 50 of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions, which stated, “No general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, can be inflicted on the population on account of the acts of individuals for which it cannot be regarded as collectively responsible” (Hague). As the result of the Czech resistance’s killing of Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler ordered all adult males living in villages deemed to have been involved in the killing to be murdered and the women transported to concentration camps (“The Massacre”). As a result, 1,344 Czechs were killed, including those at the Lidice Massacre. Hitler believed the number to be too low and ordered an additional 30,000 Czechs to be murdered, although this decision was never implemented (“The Massacre”). Article 56, which prohibited “intentional damage done” to “religious, charitable, and educational institutions” was ignored completely. The Germans mandated that Czech schools be taught in German, as well as expurgating Czech plays and operas (Lemkin 138-39).

In general, the Germans did not adhere to the international rules of occupation codified in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions in their occupation and establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. However, by passing orders down through the puppet leader, President Hácha, there remained some shred of trying to convey adherence (Lemkin 136-37).

### ***Outcomes***

Czechoslovakia was ultimately liberated by the United States in the west and the Soviet Union in the east. In order to avoid angering Stalin, U.S. forces were ordered to remain west of Prague. The Soviets received their spoils of war in the form of direct influence over Czechoslovakia. With this, the exiled Czech government, led by President Beneš returned after seven years (Zeman). The communist party in Czechoslovakia came to power, winning nearly 40% of the vote in the 1946 elections (Zeman). This began decades of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, with expulsions of Germans and other harsh actions (Zeman). The Soviets tightened their grip on Czechoslovakia after the revolts of the Prague Spring in 1968, leading to even more widespread Czech resistance. Communism was finally purged from Czechoslovakia with the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The first free elections in over 40 years were held the following year, June of 1990 (Zeman). As a result of political instabilities, such as a governmental structure that hindered majority rule and the lack of unifying political figure, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on New Year's Eve, 1992 (Zeman).

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Case of Poland**

#### ***The Road to Invasion***

Although war between the Japanese and Chinese had commenced some years earlier, the German invasion of Poland on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939 is often touted as the start of World War II.

The case of Poland is an interesting one. Unlike Czechoslovakia or France, the country was invaded separately – from the East and the West – by the Soviet Union and Germany, respectively. Given the focus of this thesis, particular attention will be paid to the invasion and subsequent occupation by the latter.

There seems to be a pattern in the countries invaded by Hitler in the run-up to the Second World War. Just as in Czechoslovakia with the ethnic German Sudetenland, the Nazis were motivated by reclaiming a piece of their perceived territory. Poland served as a barrier between Germany and East Prussia, which Germany claimed was an affront to their sovereign territory. Also of great interest to the Germans was the Free City of Danzig, known now as Gdańsk. Danzig was located on the coast of the Baltic Sea in the Northern Poland. Though officially a “Free City”, its economy was entirely dependent on Poland (Shirer 458). It was an ethnically German area that had existed as part of Germany from 1800 until the end of World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles stripped the territory away from the Germans. This had served to deepen the anger many Germans felt towards their defeat in the “Great War” and the harsh demands from them through the Treaty of Versailles (Fry).

Hitler wanted Danzig for a variety of reasons. Since it had historically been German, he believed it necessary for the furthering of his desired *Lebensraum*. Speaking on the matter to Polish Foreign Minister Josef Beck in early 1939, Hitler said, “Danzig was German, would always remain German, and sooner or later would return to Germany” (Shirer 457). There was also the strategic value in acquiring Danzig, as well as the whole of Poland. Controlling Danzig would allow the Germans to build transportation lines, connecting “mainland” Germany with East Prussia (Shirer 455).

The German desire to dominate Poland did not begin with Hitler and the Nazis. Writing in 1922, German General Hans von Seeckt expressed the German opinion towards Poland,

writing, “Poland’s existence is intolerable and incompatible with the essential conditions of Germany’s life. Poland must go and will go...with [Germany’s] aid. The obliteration of Poland must be one of the fundamental drives of German policy” (Shirer 458). Though ultimately liberated by the Allies through their defeat of Nazi Germany, Poland held antagonistic views towards both the French and the Russians in the inter-war period. The country tested their alliance with the Western Powers through the signing of the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact in January of 1934, as well as attacking the Soviet Union in 1920 (Shirer 458-59). At the same time, Poland was strengthening their diplomatic ties to Germany. Their safety was “assured” through the aforementioned Non-Aggression Pact, but it was never Hitler’s intention to develop a peaceful policy on Poland. He merely desired time to focus on his reoccupation of the Rhineland, annexation of Austria, and disintegration of Czechoslovakia. As the Poles watched all of this unfold, they became wary of their German neighbors.

Hitler continued to publicly speak of Poland in a peaceful tone, saying in a speech at the *Reichstag* in January of 1939 that the German-Polish relationship was “one of the reassuring factors in the political life in Europe” (Shirer 459). These public remarks differ drastically from the known personal feelings of Hitler and the German population at-large towards Poland and the Polish people. Nationalists in Germany viewed the Polish as not having the capacity to govern themselves after being partitioned from the 18th century until the end of the First World War. German curriculum frequently taught that the Polish economy was underdeveloped and propagated Catholic stereotypes (Evans 10).

Hitler also saw Poland as a key location for his desired “living space”. In the minds of the Nazis, Poland was no more than an area whose resources and citizens needed to be exploited. Hitler was never fond of the Czech people, but it appears that his hatred of the Polish increased in the years leading up to the invasion much more drastically than in the Czechoslovak situation.



The Polish refusal of giving in to Hitler's territorial demands, such that of Danzig, hastened this hate. Speaking to his generals little more than a week prior to the invasion, Hitler spoke of the looming attack, saying, "I have put...formations at the ready...to send man, women, and child of Polish descent and language to their deaths, pitilessly and remorselessly...Poland will be depopulated and settled with Germans" (Evans 11).

Polish fear of invasion grew in March of 1939 when the Nazis invaded the Lithuanian port city of Memel, known as the Memelland. This only increased tensions between Poland and Germany. Poland began a partial mobilization of their troops, naturally angering Hitler. Furthermore, the British and French pledged their support for Poland if Germany invaded. At the same time, Germany told the Poles that any disregard for the sovereignty of the Free City of Danzig would be considered an act of aggression (Shirer 462-65). The Nazis began their preparation of an attack on Poland, codenamed *Fall Weiß*, or "Case White". Case White outlined Nazi plans for the invasion of Poland. It had its roots all the way back to 1924 but was finished in the summer of 1939 (Kitchen 12).

The Nazi invasion of Poland, which most consider to be the start of World War II, occurred on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939. However, this was not the first day that Germans entered Poland. The day before, August 31<sup>st</sup>, saw multiple German false flag operations with the aim of justifying their imminent invasion, including the Gleiwitz Incident. Gleiwitz, a German translation of the Polish city of Gliwice, laid four miles from the German-Polish border inside Germany. German SS officers posing as Polish radicals barged into the radio station there, taking over the equipment, and announcing that it was now under Polish control. The act left one Pole dead, creating the first casualty of the War. The next day, Hitler used this charade as justification for declaring war on Poland (Graham).

The Germans marched into Poland on September 1<sup>st</sup> with what would ultimately amount to 1.5 million men, 1,500 tanks, and 300,000 horses carrying artillery and equipment (Evans 1). The Poles were unequivocally mismatched. Hoping for protection from the Western Powers, Poland delayed mobilizing their army. They were able to bring together 1.3 million men, but the superior armor and equipment of the Germans overpowered them (Evans 1-2). While the invasion of the Sudetenland was met with no resistance, Poland fought furiously. Throughout the invasion, Germany demonstrated the sheer scale of their attack power. It was a form of warfare that rapidly overpowered their enemy called *Blitzkrieg*, or “lightning war”. Couple that with Soviet attack in the East, which was facilitated by the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, and the Polish forces

did not stand a chance (Evans 6-7). Though valiantly resisting, Poland fell in little over a month, with the final Polish units

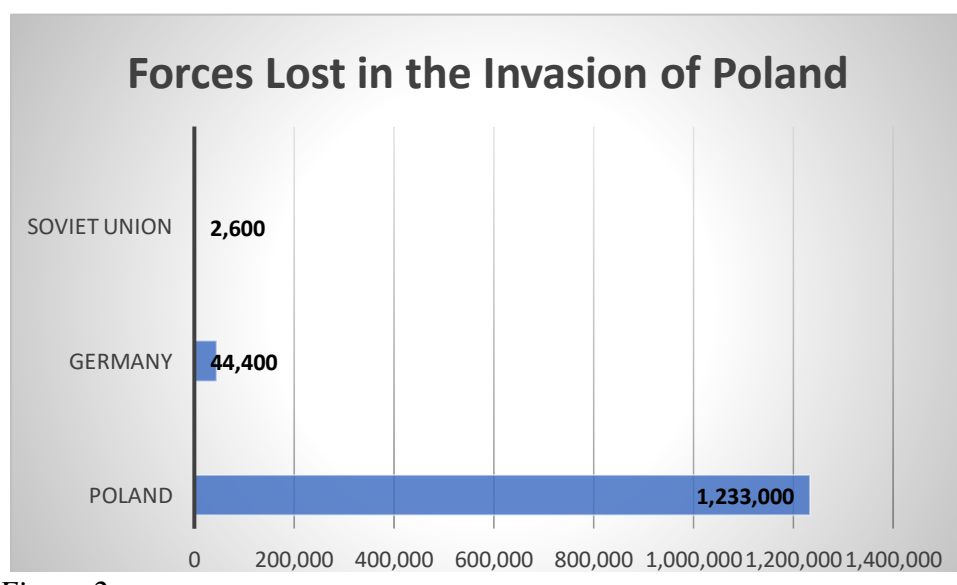


Figure 2

surrendering on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1939, though Poland’s fate was cemented long before then (Evans 7). By the time this happened, Poland had lost 70,000 troops at the hands of the Germans and 50,000 to the Soviet Red Army, as well as having 1,000,000 troops taken as prisoner. Germany too suffered. While their casualties were low compared to the Polish, they lost considerable amounts of armored vehicles, planes, and other equipment (Evans 7). Germany conquered Poland, making it the third country annexed by the Third Reich in less than two years. The

hardships faced by the Polish people, massive casualties and invasion on two fronts, had just begun.

### ***Structural Changes in German-Controlled Poland***

The contrast between the handling of the occupation of Czechoslovakia and Poland is striking. The conditions of the Czech people under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia by no means lived up to the standards of basic human decency. However, Poland was treated much more harshly. Hitler at least cared about the outward appearance of German control in Czechoslovakia, instilling a Czech Protector providing some semblance of autonomy and appointing a “moderate” *Reichsprotektor*. In Poland, any attempt to maintain appearances was discarded altogether. Hitler, with considerable aid from Stalin, sought out to rob the Polish people of any semblance of freedom (Shirer 458).

The two countries that destroyed Poland – Germany and the Soviet Union – met to formalize and define the partitioning of the country. A secret deal attached to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Act, the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, was struck during the early hours of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939, splitting Poland in two. Germany took the west and the Soviet Union the east, as well as control over the Baltic States. Furthermore, this secret protocol stated that neither country would tolerate “Polish agitation” in the territories of the others (Shirer 631-32). In typical fashion, Hitler would renege on this agreement when Operation Barbarossa was put into action in June of 1941, driving the Soviets out of Eastern Poland (Shirer 631-32).

Hitler viewed Poland as an area where his desired *Lebensraum* could be tested. This meant completely subjugating the country’s occupants, turning them into nothing more than slaves for German labor camps. Poland under German control was split into two districts – the Reich Districts of Danzig-West Prussia and the General Government. The former incorporated some 10,000,000 people into the German Reich, while being controlled by Albert Forster, a

high-ranking Nazi and Party Leader of Danzig (Evans 13). The residents of Danzig-West Prussia were granted rights, such as those granted in Austria and in the Sudetenland. The latter was controlled by Hans Frank, a former defense attorney and Reich Commissioner for Justice.

From the start of the occupation, the General Government was meant to be destabilizing and ruthless. It was given autonomy from the German Reich only for the purpose of extreme suppression that did not fit in with standard operations in Germany. Poles deemed to pose a threat to Germany, for example priests, intellectuals, and Jews, were to be moved from the annexed areas of Poland into the General Government for extermination (Evans 16-17). Hitler wanted the occupation to condition Poles to be slaves by removing any semblance of a normal life in Poland (Evans 14). Speaking to his Quartermaster General Eduard Wagner, Hitler said, “Low standard of living must be conserved... Total disorganization must be created”, as well as calling the plan “devilish” (Shirer 660). This term was an understatement.

### ***German Atrocities in Poland***

The totality of Nazi terror in Poland is almost unimaginable. In one account, fifty Poles forced to repair a bridge were rounded up into a synagogue and murdered after their work had concluded (Shirer 660). The Germans inflicted collective punishment on the Polish, in one case murdering 122 civilians because one drunken Pole had stabbed a German soldier. This was deemed to be too low of a number, so a train was stopped and multiple civilians, unaware of the situation for which they were to be punished, were murdered. Some were left hanging at the station as a warning (Evans 19). Another account tells of a Polish boy breaking the window of a police station. As a result, fifty Polish schoolboys were arrested. Their parents were ordered to beat them and, after they refused, the Germans hit them with their rifles, shooting and killing ten of the boys (Evans 19). German military forces would burn down 531 towns and leave 16,376 Poles dead by October 26, 1939, less than two months after the invasion had started (Evans 19).

In his journal, a German stormtrooper spoke of the atrocities committed, writing, “Burning houses, weeping women, screaming children... [A building housing a Polish woman] was turned over and set alight...the woman was surrounded by flames and tried to get out. But we stopped her...Soldiers can’t be treated any differently just because they’re in skirts. Her screaming rang in my ears long after. The whole village burned” (Evans 20). These examples, horrible as they were, were followed by even worse atrocities.

Germany began mass deportations of Poles in areas deemed fit for Germans and ethnic Germans to resettle. In late December of 1939, almost 90,000 Poles, Jews, and non-Jews were moved to the General Government, where those in good physical shape were deported again to Germany to work as slave laborers (Evans 29). Ultimately, over a million Polish residents would be deported without any compensation whatsoever for their hardships and lost property (Evans 30). Filling the space that the forced deportations left were ethnic Germans, many from the Baltic states and Romania, who were coerced to migrate to the area. Many were moved into the farms taken from their original owners. This mass influx of people would continue throughout the subsequent years, “necessitating” the taking of the homes of some 400,000 Poles (Evans 34-35).

The Nazis enacted a plan of Germanization of the areas with low percentages of ethnic Germans, essentially a cultural genocide of Polish society. There was a strict hierarchy in this new society, where Germans were considered to be superior to the Poles. The Polish language was outlawed, along with Polish art and newspapers (Evans 33-34). This Germanization also extended to education. Polish principals were ordered to remove all Polish textbooks and use Nazi-approved ones. Almost 200 educators in Krakow were sent to concentration camps (Evans 34). The Nazis, as is the case with many other oppressors throughout history, saw no need to educate those they oppressed. Leader of the General Government Frank expressed his intent to

turn Poland into an “intellectual wasteland” where the only viable education was that which demonstrated to the Polish the “hopelessness of their ethnic fate” (Evans 34).

The German destruction of Poland also extended to its economy. Taxes on the Polish, specifically those living in the General Government, were raised drastically. Property taxes increased by 50% and registration fees by 200%, relative to their pre-war numbers (Lemkin 227-28). The Polish economy was already in ruins, but Germany made it still worse. The Polish currency at the time, the *zloty*, became obsolete. The Germans issued a decree requesting Poles to deposit their money in German-owned banks for six months. After that time period, the money would be returned. At the same time, a policy was implemented that rendered deposits worthless. The Germans understood the Polish distrust of them and didn't expect many Poles to make deposits. They were correct in this assumption. At the end of the six months, the *zloty* became worthless (Lemkin 228-29).

Private trade in Poland was essentially destroyed, forcing Poles to trade with German-approved businesses. The economic situation in Poland led to a flourishing black market, by some estimates 80% of the day-to-day necessities (Evans 42). Food shortages, caused by German seizure of goods for the supply of their army, furthered the need of a black market in Poland. Food quotas show the shocking discrepancies between how Germans and Poles were treated in German-occupied Poland. In 1941, the daily calorie ration for Poles was 669, one-fourth that of the German allotment and more than three-times that of the Jewish quota of a mere 184 calories a day (Evans 43). If the Germans could not murder or deport the Polish people, then they would starve them to death.

As was the case with Czechoslovakia, it is impossible to explain German-occupied Poland without including the Nazi's “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”, or the *Endlösung*. Previously in this thesis, the Polish situation under Nazi occupation was argued to be the worst,

what follows is evidence for that claim. Deportations, murder, and forced relocations to ghettos occurred from the beginning of the German occupation. However, in the summer of 1941, murders of Polish Jews began on a monumental scale as Germany attacked the Soviet Union and pushed their forces out of Eastern Poland. Special killing groups known as the *Einsatzgruppen* would follow the German advance and murder Jews behind the frontlines (“The Holocaust in Poland”). “Gas Vans”, vehicles with the exhaust maneuvered so that the gas went into the cab, were a cheap and efficient way to commit mass-murder; it began around the time of the Eastern invasion (“The Holocaust in Poland”). This was a precursor to the gas chambers that murdered millions of Jews in Polish concentration camps, such as Auschwitz and Belzec (“Gas Operations”).

Poland served as a field test for Nazi experimentation in the most-efficient ways to conduct murder. Mass deportations became the norm in Poland during the middle-years of the war, with 260,000 inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto being forcefully relocated to concentration camps (“Murder of the Jews”). Before the German invasion, 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland, many tracing their roots to the Middle Ages. In less than six years, from invasion to liberation, 90% of Polish Jews would die (“Murder of the Jews”).

### ***German Adherence to International Law***

Though the acts carried out by Germany in Poland would violate the most fundamental principles of international law, Hitler still made attempts to reconcile his invasion with international law. The aforementioned Gleiwitz Incident, where Nazi SS troops disguised as Polish partisans took over a German radio station, served as Hitler’s justification for invading Poland. However, this is yet another case that highlights the limitations of international law in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The League of Nations Covenant and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, both of which Germany and Poland were parties, call for members to not resort to war against

each other (Scott 174). However, Germany never formally declared war on Poland. Combat and war occurred, but international laws such as that in the Kellogg-Briand pact were unclear in whether or not the use of armed force short of war was prohibited (Scott 175). Hitler seemed to have circumvented international law by creating an act that gave Germany a just cause to invade Poland, and the vagueness surrounding the *jus ad bellum* laws at the time aided him in doing so.

Hitler's goal in the occupation of Poland was much more heinous than that in Czechoslovakia or France. The Nazis viewed the Polish people as sub-human, and, therefore, lesser than the German race. Hitler wanted to liquidate Poland, eradicating non-German Poles through murder or slavery. The Germans achieved this by destroying the Polish economy, carrying out mass murders, and looting Polish property (Lemkin 221-32).

Article 46, stating, "Family honors and rights, individual lives and private property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated", was flagrantly violated (Hague). The establishment of concentration camps, such as Auschwitz and Belzec, and the usage of death squads, the *Einsatzgruppen* for example, would carry out Hitler's "final solution to the Jewish problem". To say the murder of some 3,000,000 Polish Jews, for no other reason than their religion, unquestionably disrespects "religious convictions and liberty" is an enormous understatement. Personal property was sacked in the form of forced deportations, which left Polish homes free for the inhabitation of ethnic Germans. Furthermore, property was sequestered for the sake of "serving the public interest" in the General Government (Lemkin 227). Legal reasons for this taking were defined by the Germans in command, essentially giving them carte blanche to take anything for any reason. The extent of the German sequestration was so great that a Trustee Administration was created to oversee it, the *Treuhandstelle* (Lemkin 227).



As in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Germans frequently carried out collective punishment. Incidents of disproportional retribution, such as the atrocities recounted in this thesis and many more untold, violate Article 50 of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions, which forbids collective punishment in cases where the population cannot be considered collectively responsible (Hague).

The German destruction of the Polish economy was multi-faceted and, predictively, violated multiple articles of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. By drastically raising taxes on the Polish people, the Germans violated Articles 48, which compelled occupants to collect taxes “in accordance with the rules in existence and the assessment in force”, as well as requiring those taxes to “defray the expenses of the administration of the occupied territory on the same scale as that by which the legitimate Government was bound” (Hague). With these acts, Article 49, which necessitated that new taxes be exclusively for military purposes, was also violated (Hague). Taxes collected by the Germans were never for the sake of increasing public spending in Poland, but to ravage even further the lives of Poles.

A limitation of Article 55, which stated, “The occupying State shall only be regarded as administrator and usufructuary of the public buildings, real property, forests, and agricultural works belonging to the hostile State, and situated in the occupied country. It must protect the capital of these properties and administer it according to the rules of usufruct”, was exposed in the handling of the Polish agriculture sector (Hague). The Germans took over Polish collective agricultural societies, which fostered trade with Polish farmers. In order to receive any manufactured goods, which were essentially held only by the Germans, the Poles were forced to sell part of their agricultural product to these now German owned societies (Lemkin 229). The Germans did not forcefully takeover Polish agriculture, but compelling Polish farmers to sell to them was functionally equivalent.

The Nazi process of Germanization took hold in the Polish educational system, violating Article 56 of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. Universities and liberal arts schools were shut down, but trade schools were maintained. This was likely correlated to the German goal of transforming the Polish people into slave laborers for the German Reich (Lemkin 229-30). Scientific laboratories, art galleries, and individually-owned pieces of art were seized and taken to Germany (Lemkin 229-30). This was another violation of Article 56, which prohibited any “...seizure of, and destruction, or intentional damage done to such institutions, to historical monuments, works of art or science” (Hague).

It should be noted that, as in Czechoslovakia, areas of Poland annexed and incorporated into the Greater German Reich involved military conscription (Clifton). Ethnically German Poles, or *Volksdeutsche*, were granted German citizenship, with all the privileges and obligations that came with it. Among these obligations was the duty to serve in the German military. This illustrates the limitations of Article 44, which states, “Any compulsion of the population of occupied territory to take part in military operations against its own country is prohibited” (Hague). This violation is complicated by the fact that the area that involved conscription was not considered an occupied territory, but part of Germany itself. The General Government, where Poles deemed undesirable were relocated, largely did not practice conscription (“*Weieleni*”). Furthermore, this forced service took place after the German-Polish War came to an end, thus no Poles were obligated to fight against their former countrymen, but against the Allied Powers. At the time of these occurrences in World War II, the international laws that outlawed this were vague and lacked comprehensiveness. Therefore, conclusive proof of the violation of Article 44 is difficult.

The German occupation of Poland, especially in the unincorporated General Government, saw Hitler abandon any semblance of lawful rule. Murdering, stealing from, and oppressing the Polish, the Germans robbed them of life and liberty during their occupation.

### ***Outcomes***

Poland's suffering did not end when German rule concluded. In January of 1945, the Red Army captured Warsaw. By March of the same year, German troops were no longer in Poland. With one oppressive occupier removed, another, the Soviet Union, filled the vacuum. The Soviet Union would control Poland as a satellite state, taking over some its territory through the Potsdam Conference.<sup>14</sup> What Poland lost to the Soviet Union in the East, it gained in the West in the form of formerly German territory. This created the problem of having to resettle some 2 million people ("Learn the History"). After elections in 1947, under the wing of the Soviet Union, Poland became communist and joined the Warsaw Pact in 1955 ("Poland Profile"). The lack of personal and economic freedoms, as well as food shortages, led to widespread public revolt against communism in the middle third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These issues led to the social movement *Solidarność*, or Solidarity. This movement, which comprised 25% of the Polish population, would lead the way for a peaceful revolution and break from the Soviet Union in 1989 ("Learn the History"). Political reforms would follow, including market liberalization, party plurality, and the joining of NATO and the European Union in 1999 and 2004, respectively ("Learn the History").

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Case of France**

#### ***The Road to Invasion: Interwar France***

The German invasion of France seemed almost inevitable. France, with considerable help from the allies, had defeated Germany in the First World War. They greatly benefitted from the

post-war treaties, including the Treaty of Versailles, that expanded the French empire in Africa and the Middle East, returned territories lost in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and granted them huge reparation payments from Germany (Christofferson 3). Even in victory, France did not flourish in the inter-war period. The War ravaged France, with 40% of soldiers being wounded at least once and some 1.3 million losing their lives (Christofferson 2). The Great Depression was especially devastating to France. The effects began to be felt by the French in 1931 and would not subside until 1938, during their rearmament as a response to the growing aggression of Nazi Germany (Christofferson 4).

In the late 1930's as Germany grew stronger, both economically and militaristically, France experienced domestic turmoil. A worsening economy angered the population. This anger was focused on growing support for fascist parties in France, such as *Solidarité française* and *Croix de feu* (Christofferson 4-5). The victory of the leftists in the 1932 elections served as a rallying cry for the fascists and others on the right. After riots killed 17 people in 1934, the existing government resigned (Christofferson 5). Those on the left responded to this by banding together to form the Popular Front, a party uniting far-left ideologies. The Popular Front would come to power in the elections of May 1936 (Christofferson 5). The Popular Front's success in driving fascism out of France can be attributed to its worker-friendly reform policies, strong support for maintaining democracy, and outright ban on fascist parties. However, it would not last. With fascism essentially eradicated, the Popular Front lost its enemy that aided in the uniting of different ideologies – ideologies that under normal circumstances could not be contained in one single party. The Popular Front would disintegrate in 1938 after the Radical Party, or *parti radical*, leader Édouard Daladier came to power. He would reverse many Popular Front policies, such as reinstating a 48-hour work week and taking a more aggressive stance on

unionized labor. This, along with the rearmament process, gave the French economy a needed short-term boost (Christofferson 6).

### *Anglo-French Reaction to the Invasion of Poland*

As previously mentioned in this thesis, France, and Britain, were at the forefront of the diplomatic battle against Germany in the later inter-war years. Even when faced with the increasing aggression of Hitler, the two powers wanted to avoid another conflict in Europe. A policy of appeasement was chosen, even as France balked at the demands of Hitler in the occupation of the Rhineland (Goutard 45-46). This appeasement reached its apex with the signing of the Munich Agreement, which was discussed at the length in the previous chapter on Czechoslovakia. Time and time again, Britain and France capitulated when faced with German expansion. This put them in a weakened position strategically. When Hitler broke the rules of the agreement in his expansion past the Sudetenland, Britain and France did not come to the aid of Czechoslovakia. In the months leading up to the German invasion of Poland, the U.K. and France sought to form an alliance with the Soviet Union. If successful, it might have stopped Germany, either in combat or due to enhanced diplomatic clout (Shirer 543). Britain and France again failed, proving unsuccessful when faced with a German-Soviet alliance.

Later in the year, the two states pledged their support for Poland in the event of a German invasion. When Germany invaded their neighbor to the east in September of 1939, Britain and France had finally had enough. Both reaffirmed their support for Poland on the night of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939. France echoed the words of a British statement sent to the German Foreign Ministry, which read, “Unless the German Government are prepared... [to suspend] all aggressive action against Poland... His Majesty’s Government will without hesitation fulfill their obligation to Poland” (Shirer 602). The statement did not stop German aggression. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, France declared that unless German forces were withdrawn from Poland by 5:00

p.m., they would be at war (“1939: Britain and France”). The hour came and went with no signs of a German retreat. The path to World War II had been set.

Between the German invasion of Poland and their eventual attack on France on May 10, 1940, there existed a “phony war”. In this period of roughly eight months, there was no direct conflict between France and Germany. Instead, it was a period in which the two nations started rapidly arming themselves. The *Wehrmacht* was not yet ready to wage war in the west. However, Hitler, at the behest of his generals, did not seem to be worried. Britain and France’s hesitation to confront an aggressive Germany remained in his mind. The German Chancellor told his generals, “[The Western Powers] have never up to now acted with any vigor. Why should they do so now?” (Goutard 49).

Hitler was enthusiastic about the German forces conquering Czechoslovakia and Poland, never shy about using all of Germany’s formidable military power. However, there is evidence that this was not the case regarding confrontation with the Western Powers, at least in the aftermath of the invasion of Poland. He expected the Anglo-French action to mimic that which had occurred in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Even after the declarations of war, Hitler hoped that the threat of war would achieve an easy victory. German General Siegfried Westphal expressed Hitler’s surprise at the actions, writing, “[Hitler] was convinced that Britain and France would make no move and let him peacefully devour Poland...” (Goutard 51). Hitler’s further hesitation can be seen in his instructions for the conduct of war, which read, “In the West, the initiative in hostilities is to be left to Britain and France...The crossing of the Western frontier...without my express authority is forbidden” (Goutard 52).

### ***The German Invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France***

Hitler saw strategic advantage in holding territory in Belgium, the Netherlands, and northern France. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Hitler sent an order demanding preparations be made for

a westward invasion to “acquire as great an area of Holland, Belgium, northern France as possible” (Shirer 714-15). The plan, codenamed *Fall Gelb*, or “Case Yellow” would be postponed several times. The reasons given for the delay are particularly interesting. The German Foreign Office was in the midst of finding justification for the imminent invasion (Shirer 719). This shows that the diplomacy and legality of German aggression was still on the mind of Hitler and the Nazis. Finding a just cause to present the international community was seemingly important enough to delay the invasion. However, the very nature of invading neutral countries was a violation of international law.

The invasion finally commenced on May 10, 1940. The German plan was one that involved enormous risk. The French Maginot Line, a series of heavily fortified defenses along the eastern border, was meant to force the Germans to attack through Belgium, where the Allied Forces could provide strong resistance. The Germans sent many troops to this area, seemingly playing into France’s hand. However, the brunt of the German attack came from *Panzer* divisions further south into the Ardennes Forest, terrain considered by the French to be too rough to allow an easy invasion. It proved no deterrent for the power and might of the German army, that came full-force with tanks, troops, and *Stuka* dive bombers. The Germans continued to defeat the Allies, eventually moving toward the English Channel and enclosing their remaining forces (Shirer 723-28).

Germany simply overpowered its enemies in this conflict. The Allies were disorganized and ill-equipped for the German onslaught. Just five days after the invasion started, on May 15th, the Netherlands surrendered (Shirer 720). Belgium would follow on May 28<sup>th</sup>, with King Leopold III going against the advice of his government (Shirer 729). The French would continue to fight, although with no hope of victory, until June 14<sup>th</sup> (Shirer 738). Paris, nearly barren at this point, was under German control. The Nazi swastika flew from the Eiffel Tower with a banner

draped across reading *Deutschland siegt auf allen Fronten*; “Germany is victorious on all fronts”.

### ***The Defeat of France***

France’s swift defeat at the hands of Germany shocked the world. Historians disagree about how France was defeated so quickly. Some argue that France’s interwar pacifism made them unfit and unprepared for the brutality of war. Others argue that the French military was ineffectively armed. Both of these claims are false. Based on numbers in late 1939, France was not at the disadvantage that the eventual outcome would imply. The French frontline forces numbered at 2,776,000 men, with over 2,000,000 in reserve. Comparing this to the German field army strength of 2,758,000 and under 2,000,000 in reserve paints a picture of French superiority (Goutard 23). Though boasting that they had 7,000 tanks, or *Panzer*, at their disposal, Germany actually had around 2,200-2,600 ready for battle. This nearly equals the French number, which was around 2,200 in place to fight (Goutard 26-28). While it is true that the French air forces paled in comparison to the German *Luftwaffe*, the two nations were essentially at parity at the start of the conflict, if not an out-right French advantage (Christofferson 18).

It can be said that World War I was a 20<sup>th</sup> century war fought in a 19<sup>th</sup> century mindset. This same phenomenon can partly explain the fall of France in 1940. The French forces, while ample in size, had started rearming later than Germany. The French expected any war to come to be fought in the same manner World War I had – an example was the use of tanks. France viewed tanks as being a complement to their infantrymen and, thus, produced them to be slower and more heavily armored (Goutard 28-29). The Germans, fitting in with their plan of a “lightning war”, used their tanks as an offensive force in their own right, emphasizing speed and mobility (Goutard 28-29).



Both armies were capable of fighting a war. Germany simply modernized its strategy while France focused on refighting World War I. The French dug in and tried to fight a defensive war against the German *Blitzkrieg*. However, they overestimated the quality of their defenses and underestimated the power of Germany. Some reports show French generals disregarding structural weaknesses of their defenses, as well as believing the Germans to be “dead afraid” of the prospect of attacking (Davis). The French did not understand German tactics prior to the invasion. Most likely was a failure in high command on the part of the French. If the French had fought an offensive war rather than a defensive one akin to that of the First World War, the outcome might have been different. This sentiment is expressed by American Ambassador to France William Bullitt Jr. in a July of 1940 message back to the United States, which stated, “The simple people have done well, as always. It is the elites, the upper classes, who have totally failed” (Christofferson 32-33).

### ***German Occupied France***

French leaders disagreed on how to proceed after it was clear that France had fallen. Some, such as General Charles de Gaulle, wanted to continue the fight from either Brittany, a location that would foster an easy escape to Britain, or North Africa, where the French Empire could provide resources vital to a continuing fight (Christofferson 30). Prime Minister Paul Reynaud took the unpopular stance of opposing an armistice, then resigning in protest. Immediately replacing him was Philippe Pétain, a World War I hero who held authoritarian and Nazi-esque views. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1940, the day after becoming Prime Minister, Pétain made a radio announcement advocating an end to the fight and peace talks with the Germans (Evans 131).

The pageantry of the armistice, which was signed on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, was of particular importance to Hitler. He ordered that it occur in the same location as the German surrender after

World War I. Furthermore, he ordered that the exact train which the post-World War I armistice was signed be used again, going as far as taking it out of the museum where it was held and putting it in the exact same spot it was some 20 years prior (Shirer 741-42). The armistice limited the number of troops in France to 100,000 and required huge sums in damages, near half of their annual revenue by some estimates, impositions similar to those the French laid on the Germans after World War I (Christofferson 35).

After defeat, France essentially disintegrated. In the north was the Occupied Zone under complete German control. As a reward for entering the war, Italy was granted a small section of France in the southeast. The greater south remained unoccupied but was ruled by what amounted to a puppet regime based in Vichy known as “Vichy France”. Figure 3 below displays these partitions. Vichy France, led by Pétain, took on authoritarian policies (Jackson 232). Arguing that the “great disaster” of French defeat necessitated a dismantling of the “institutions which brought it about”, Pétain was given the ability by Parliament to re-write the French constitution, essentially giving himself sole power within the regime (Jackson 232-33). With this, the French Third Republic came to an end.

German-controlled France in the north was made up of the Occupied Zone and the regions of Alsace-Lorraine. The latter, given to France after World War I, was *de facto* annexed into the Greater German Reich. The Nazis wanted to assimilate those in this region into the Greater German Reich. Alsace-Lorraine was separated from greater France through a customs



Figure 3 (Gaba)

frontier. The names of towns and people were translated into German. When, in the case of the latter, a translation did not exist, a new German name was to be taken. The school system was made German by terminating all teachers not ethnically German (Lemkin 172-73). Private property was confiscated. Individuals needed Nazi permission – which could be revoked at any time for any reason – to acquire property, in essence limiting this right to Germans (Lemkin 173). As in the case in Czechoslovakia and Poland, the economy was strictly controlled. Products, including food, were taken by the Germans for their own benefit. Furthermore, the prices of these goods were set by Germany. Even with all these restrictions, the Nazis were not content. Mass deportations of French continued some 270,000, mainly to Vichy France and the Greater German Reich (Lemkin 173).

The Occupied Zone, basically a German dictatorship, was controlled by German military leaders. Vichy France still had legislative powers in the Occupied Zone, but the German command had ultimate power over the French authorities (Lemkin 174). The judicial system was also controlled by German military leaders, and, unsurprisingly, was extremely harsh. The penalty of death existed for French who didn't execute their "duty" of serving as military guards, refused labor conscription, or interfered with economic operations, which were seen as extensions of the war effort (Lemkin 175). Owners of expensive art, quite numerous in the Occupied Zone, had to register them with the German authorities could not be sold without German permission. Not surprisingly, Germans were able to acquire art for cheap (Lemkin 176).

Pétain enacted authoritarian-esque policies in Vichy France. Those whose fathers were not of French blood were prohibited from working in the public sector. A total of 15,000 non-native citizens had their rights taken from them, nearly half were Jews (Christofferson 39). Vichy France was by no means a safe place for Jews. Being aligned with Nazi Germany, anti-Semitic views came to the forefront. Naturalized Jews were first robbed of their citizenship and, later,

sent to internment camps (Christofferson 104-05). Jews were also banned from many professions, including teaching and government work, with the number of Jews allowed to work in the legal and medical fields restricted. Pétain and Vichy France tended to look to the laws imposed in the German Occupied Zone when it came to anti-Semitic legislation. After the Occupied Zone enacted laws to “eliminate all Jewish influence in the national economy,” such as the taking of Jewish property, Vichy France followed suit (Christofferson 106-07). Of the 76,000 Jews in France deported to extermination camps in the East, only 2,500 would return (“The Holocaust in France”).

Vichy France, though technically autonomous, was under rigid control of the Nazi regime. As the war went on, this relationship became more one-sided. Germany essentially took over Vichy France in 1942, leaving power with Pétain but imposing German policing and their *Gestapo* on the area (Lemkin 183). As was the case in Czechoslovakia and Poland, the Nazis wanted the people of France to serve as slave laborers for the Reich. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1942, compulsory labor service was enacted, mandating that all men between the ages of 18 and 50, and single women between 21 and 35, to provide labor for the regime. Those who refused were imprisoned for five years and fined, with increase penalties for repeat offenders (Lemkin 183-84). In essence, Vichy France capitulated to the will and leadership of Nazi Germany, sometimes without much direction at all, at nearly every turn, refusing to enter the war on the German side being a notable exception. Whether this was out of genuine enthusiasm or for the sake of self-preservation is still being debated (“The Holocaust in France”). To those who had their or their family’s lives taken from them, whether in eastern concentration camps or those located in France itself, there is no debate.

### *German Adherence to International Law*

Hitler's reluctance to openly use non-aggravated force against invaded countries in the late-1930's can likely be attributed to the desire to not provoke France and the United Kingdom into war. Germany was not yet fully rearmed and thus wanted to avoid conflict. However, by the time of the invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France in May of 1940, the German army was fully mobilized. The power of the *Blitzkrieg* had been showcased the previous fall in the invasion of Poland, and Norway and Denmark were all but conquered. The German army seemed unbeatable. Yet Germany still tried to justify their actions to the international community, with the invasion being delayed multiple times due to the Foreign Office deeming Hitler's reasoning to invade not justifiable enough (Shirer 719).

Eventually, the reasoning given would be that Belgium and the Netherlands were going to allow the United Kingdom and France to traverse their countries to attack the Ruhr, and Germany was justified in their invasion to stop them (Boissoneault). There is no evidence to support the German claim, likely because it was largely fabricated ("The Trial of German"). The German invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg was indefensible and not the result of German self-protection, but the enactment of a long-held plan of Hitler's desired westward conquest (Boissoneault).

Hitler and the Foreign Ministry seemed to be less concerned about justifying their actions compared with invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland, likely due to the German Chancellor's recent extraordinary success in his conquests. Hitler faced few repercussions for his actions and likely felt invincible. The invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland were justified by elaborate schemes to incite violence, but the justification of this invasion was concocted hastily. On the other hand, the German invasion of France can be considered in accordance with international

law. After invading Poland in September of 1939, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, giving Hitler the “cover” of self-defense.

The people of France were not spared from the Hitler’s villainous desires. German rule in France was heinous, although probably less extreme than Poland. Hitler did not wish to make France a wasteland, but he did strive to turn the French into slave laborers for the benefit of the German Reich. Germany pursued policies of mass deportations, forced military service, labor conscription, and religious persecution.

The region of Alsace-Lorraine was essentially annexed into the Greater German Reich, though never in an official capacity (Lemkin 172). This makes it easier to claim that Germany was a belligerent occupier rather than a traditional government. Policies of Germanization in the area violated several articles in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. The Germans transformed the education system into one that fit the ideals of the Nazi Party. Grammar schools were closed and reopened with mandatory German curriculum and language (Lemkin 172-73). This is in direct violation of Article 56, which prohibits any intentional damage done to institutions of education (Hague Convention, 1907). French names of people and towns were outlawed and either translated or changed to German (Lemkin 172). Taking away names that had likely belonged to a family for generations is most-assuredly disrespects “family rights and honor”, thus violating Article 46 (Hague). The Germans altered the judicial system in Alsace-Lorraine, introducing German criminal law, Germanizing the courts, and ordering sentences to be carried out “in the name of the German people” (Lemkin 173). Article 43 orders occupiers to respect “the laws in force in the country” and the Germans made no attempt to follow that rule (Hague). By denying Jews employment and relocating them, in many cases to concentration camps, the Germans made a mockery of Article 46 (Hague).

In the Occupied Zone, German military commanders forced the local population to serve as military guards (Lemkin 175). This undoubtedly violates Article 52, that prohibits requisitions or services, including those for military operations (Hague). Article 52 was further violated when the German officials enacted labor conscription for French inhabitants in the Occupied Zone (Lemkin 175). There were hundreds of valuable works of art owned by French in the Occupied Zone. The Germans took advantage of this by outlawing unauthorized private sale of art, essentially controlling who had the right of ownership (Lemkin 176). This violates Articles 46 and 56, which prohibit the confiscation of private property and the seizure of works of art, respectively (Hague).

Though completely controlled by Hitler, Vichy France was officially autonomous. This makes it difficult to claim violations of international law, given that the abuses were handed down by a “legitimized” government, not an occupying force. Nevertheless, violations of the Hague Conventions occurred. Many of these violations were also prevalent in the areas of Alsace-Lorraine and the Occupied Zone, such as those of labor conscription and mass deportations of Jews (Lemkin 178-84).

### ***Outcomes***

The eventual liberation of France was assured with successful Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. Just over a month later, Paris would be freed from German control (Flower). As the Germans were pushed back, local pockets of resistance took over the vacated towns and villages. Vichy officials, such as Philippe Pétain, fled to Germany, claiming to be a government-in-exile (Flower). Meanwhile, Charles de Gaulle established a provisional government, which would be legitimized by official recognition from the United States, United Kingdom, and Soviet Union in October of 1944 (Flower). Huge numbers of collaborators under

the German reign were punished. Approximately 50,000 individuals were stripped of citizen rights, 40,000 sentenced to prison, and 700 to 800 executed (Flower).

France experienced political instability after World War II. The resistance was unified in their fight against the Germans while occupied, but this unity dissipated in the post-war years. Approximately 96% of the population supported enacting a system different than that which ruled before the war, but agreement on the nature of the system could not be achieved (Flower). Some, such as the communists and those on the far-left, supported a single chamber legislature, while others desired the stability that a strong executive head would bring (Flower). Ultimately, the Fourth Republic of France would be similar to the Third Republic, with the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, holding most of the power.

French economic growth in the 1950's was followed by demands for independence among the French colonies, such as Algeria and Vietnam (Flower). Still, France would be a major power in Europe during the second-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were at the forefront of what would become the European Union during its early years and cemented itself as a nuclear power with their testing of an atomic bomb in 1960 (Weintz).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

The facile conclusion that Adolf Hitler paid no heed to international law is inaccurate. History is replete with subtlety and nuances that seldom are accurately and completely rendered. Hitler was highly selective in his adherence to international law in his invasions of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France. It is hardly surprising that the German Chancellor appeared to use international law when it benefitted the Third Reich and abandon or circumvent it when it conflicted with his evil goals. It seems that Hitler tried to abide by international *jus ad bellum*



laws prior to German invasions, going to great lengths to justify German intervention. However, once German occupation began, any appearance of legality evaporated, i.e., *jus in bello* was ignored.

Many aspects of German occupation expose the limitations of international law prior to and during World War II. The imprecision of certain aspects of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions allowed German actions to circumvent the intent of the laws. International law also failed to address the gray areas, such as German pressure on areas like Vichy France and the ultimatum given before the Sudetenland invasion, where Nazi Germany forced others to bend to their will. World War II was the largest conflict in history. One would hope this will continue to be the case. There is evidence that international law learned from its failures prior to and during the war. The international order was re-crafted creating the “Long Peace” that has existed since 1945. It would be foolhardy to proclaim lasting peace. However, the fact there was only 20 years between World Wars I and II and 75 years since the end of World War II provides cause for cautious optimism.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

## Zane Robert Dilts

**Education**

Pennsylvania State University  
 Bachelor of Arts in Political Science  
 Applied Economics Minor  
 Behrend Honors Program  
 Schreyer Honors College  
 Dean's List

Expected Graduation: May 2019

Fall 2015-Fall 2018

**Experience**

Research Intern, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., July-August 2018

- Archived and classified letters sent by Senator Bob Casey Jr.
- Attended and composed summaries of hearings relevant to the Senator
- Read, analyzed, and summarized key points from daily press clippings
- Researched and compiled extensive summaries of Pennsylvania counties
- Utilized the "LexisNexis" database for research purposes

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant | Pennsylvania State University | Erie, PA

Fall 2017

- Aided professor in lecturing on the Politics of Western Europe
- Prepared class material including summaries on European political issues
- Taught class in instances of Professor's absence

Undergraduate Research Assistant | Pennsylvania State University | Erie, PA

Spring 2016-Fall 2017

- Assisted research in International Treaty Law
- Composed summaries on treaties

Intern | Borough of Indiana | Indiana, PA

Summer 2017

- Composed memos on community issues
- Researched a housing initiative within the Borough
- Aided Borough managers in presenting issues to the Borough Council

Student | IES European Union | Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

Spring 2017

- Interacted with officials from various IGO's and European Union institutions to foster a better understanding of European issues
- Increased understanding and appreciation for cultural differences through travel throughout Western Europe and in Northern Africa
- Overcame cultural and linguistic barriers to engage with individuals from different ways of life

**Other Work Experience**

Farmhand | Green Lawn Farms | Marion Center, PA

Summer 2008-present

- Assisted with day-to-day operations of a dairy farm
- Operated heavy machinery
- Managed herd of 60 dairy cattle to ensure quality milk production

**Skills**

- Computer: Microsoft Office, C++ Programming Language, LexisNexus
- Languages: German



**Campus Involvement**

Member | Penn State Behrend Political Science Society

Member | Penn State Behrend Agriculture Club

Member | Penn State Behrend Circle K

Spring 2016-present

Fall 2015-Spring 2016

Fall 2017-presen