

A WORLD



AT ARMS

A GLOBAL
HISTORY OF
WORLD WAR II

New Edition

Gerhard L. Weinberg

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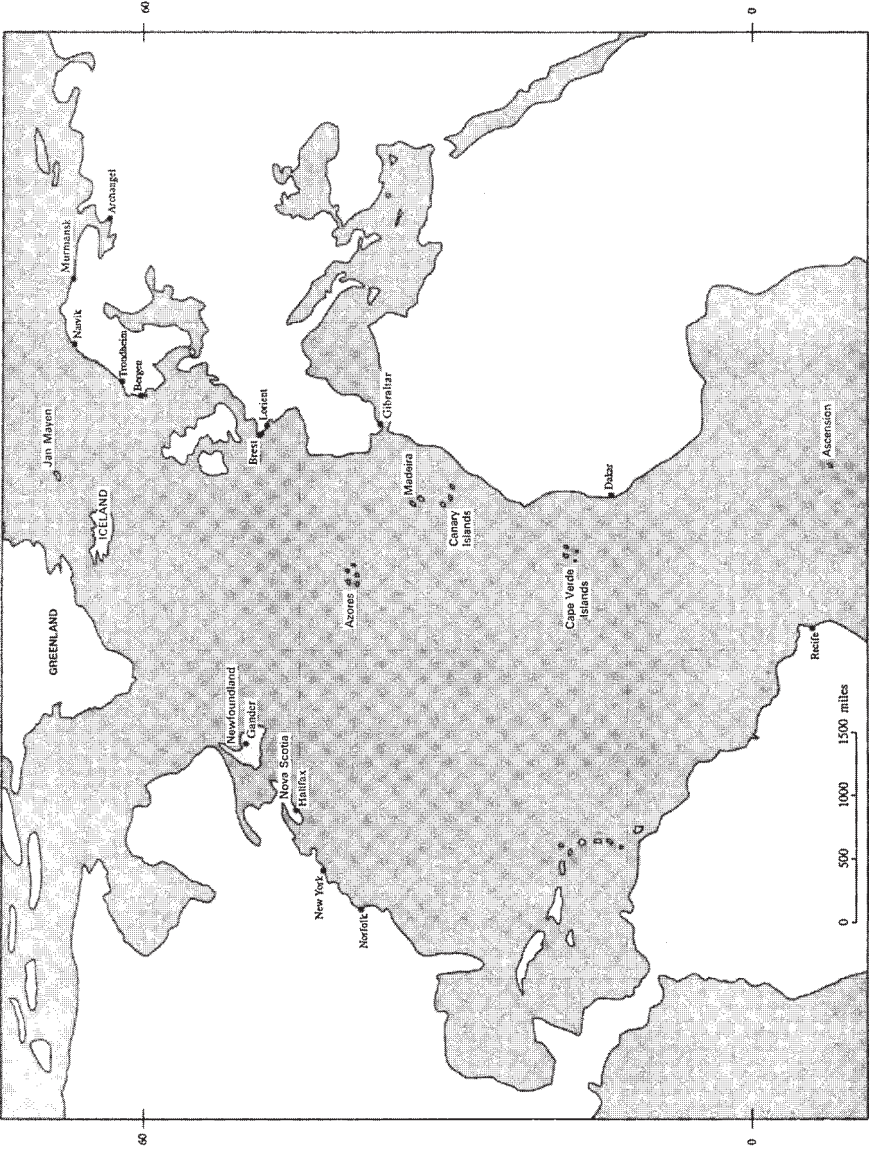
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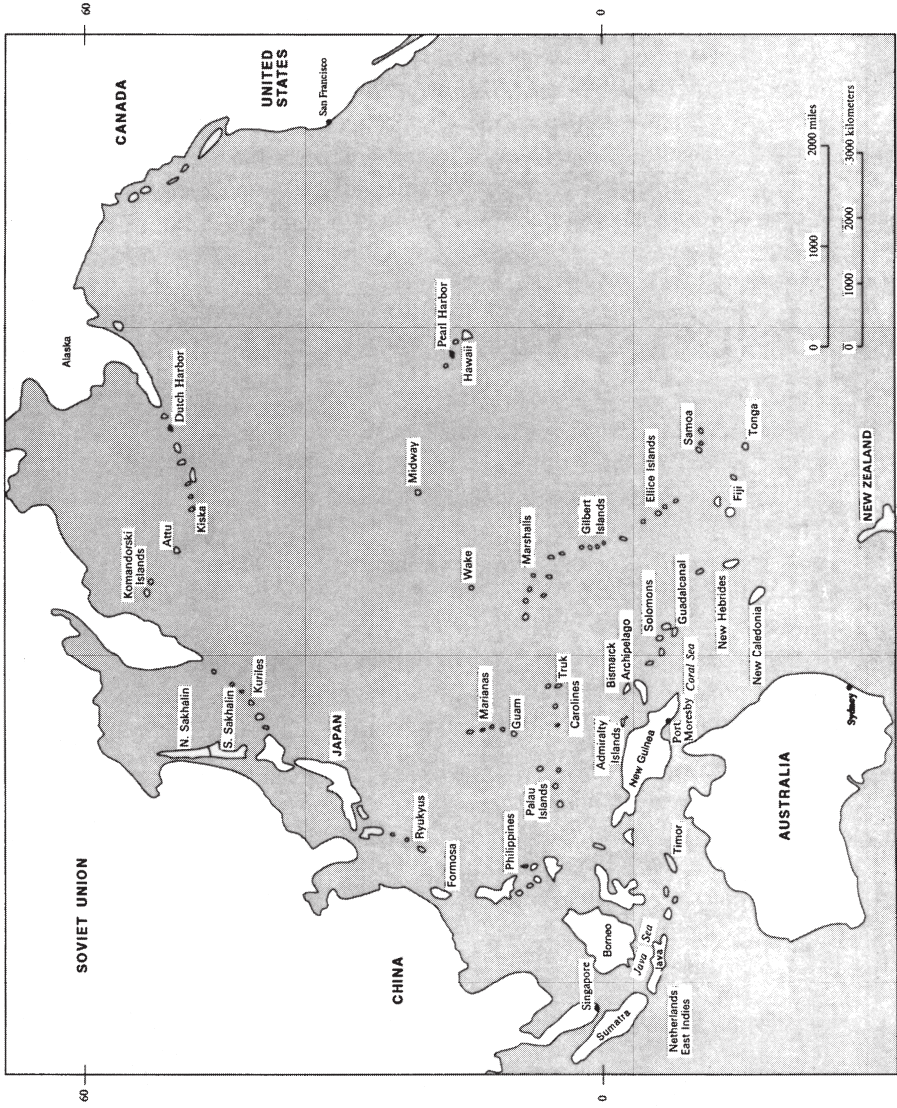
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GERHARD L. WEINBERG

A WORLD AT ARMS

**A GLOBAL HISTORY OF
WORLD WAR II**

Second Edition



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FOR JANET

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

In the decade since this book was published, kind readers have followed the request in the original Preface to send me corrections. I am most grateful to those who have taken the trouble to call to my attention errors that it has been possible to correct in subsequent printings. Reviewers of the book have been very kind to it. In the intervening decade, there have been important new materials made accessible to scholars and there has, in addition, been a continuous outpouring of scholarly works dealing with the greatest war of which we know. While there may be an opportunity to revise the book as a whole, in the meantime this is a good interval at which to point to some areas where either changes will be needed or new studies have reinforced the interpretation previously offered.

Certainly the original thesis that Germany deliberately initiated World War II on September 1, 1939, by a procedure that drew on Adolf Hitler's "lesson" of Munich, namely that he would not be cheated of war again as had happened in 1938, has been confirmed by the detailed examination of the immediate origins of the war.¹ An analysis of Soviet procedure in dealing with the German army in the 1939 Polish campaign by promptly and courteously returning all German prisoners of war captured by the Poles makes for an extraordinary contrast with the opposite handling of British and American prisoners held by the Germans in 1944–45.²

The description of the German decision to attack the Soviet Union has been confirmed by the new materials that have surfaced from both German and Soviet archives as a result of the effort of some to convert the German invasion into a sort of preventive move designed to forestall a planned invasion

¹ Stefan Kley, *Hitler, Ribbentrop und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996).

² Compare the account in Sergej Slutsch, "Die deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen im Polenfeldzug und die Frage des Eintritts der UdSSR in den Zweiten Weltkrieg," in Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (ed.), *Präventivkrieg? Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 2000), with the one in John Nichol and Tony Rennell, *The Last Escape: The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners of War in Europe 1944–45* (New York: Viking, 2002).

by the Soviets invented by the advocates of this interpretation. From the German side we now have the project of the German army's chief of staff, General Franz Halder, for an invasion of the Soviet Union still in the fall of 1940 with orders and preparations starting on June 3, even before the armistice with France.³ When Hitler decided on July 31 that the fall of 1940 would not allow for enough time to prepare and carry through the invasion, but that preparations for an invasion in 1941 should start, the general staff was already working on that. If there had been any concern about a Soviet invasion, why the willingness to wait?

From the Soviet archives there is plenty of confirming evidence for Stalin's desperate efforts to join the Tripartite Pact and his refusal – even hours after the German invasion – to credit the obvious signs of German intentions.⁴ It is now known that Stalin not only received a summary of the German invasion plan from the government of the United States but even earlier from his own intelligence service, but that he refused to believe either warning and forbade his military advisors to take action against the German concentrations in the spring of 1941. As for the offensive projects imagined for him, it is difficult to square such concepts with the Soviet decision that the railways in the newly acquired Eastern portion of Poland were to be changed to the Russian wide railway gauge over seven years.

A subject that has needlessly cluttered the bookshelves has been the continued inability of some scholars to recognize that the critical issue was not whether the Germans could seize Moscow – or some other specific place – but whether the Soviet government, like that of Alexander I in 1812, could retain control of the unoccupied portions of the country and mobilize its human and material resources. Neither the Tsarist government of Nicholas II nor the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky had been able to do that, even though the Germans had not advanced in 1917 as far as they did in 1941 and 1942. As I pointed out in my book, the Soviet regime was fully prepared to carry on the war if Moscow were captured by the Germans. We now know of preparations for the demolition of important buildings in the capital if it actually fell.⁵

The accessibility of some, but by no means all, Soviet records has certainly enriched our understanding of the whole course of the fighting on the Eastern Front. Not only the defeat of the Soviet offensive on the central portion of the

³ Carl Dirks and Karl-Heinz Janssen (eds.), "Plan Otto," *Die Zeit*, September 19, 1997, p. 16. I am grateful to Mr. Janssen and to Mr. John V. Hunter III for sending me copies of this article.

⁴ See the book edited by Bianka Pietrov-Ennker cited in note 2 and Gerd R. Ueberschär and Lev A. Bezymenskij (eds.), *Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion 1941: Die Kontroverse um die Präventivkriegsthese* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1998).

⁵ Benjamin B. Fischer, "Preparing to Blow Up the Bolshoi Theater," *International Intelligence History Study Group Newsletter* 7, No. 2 (Winter 1999): 8–10; also published in *Center for the Study of Intelligence Bulletin* No. 10 (Winter 2000): 11–12.

front in the winter of 1942–43 (Operation “Mars”) but many other aspects of the bitter combat in that theater have been illuminated by the books of David Glantz and others.⁶ We now also have a much more reliable account of the enormous Soviet military casualties as well as a careful study of German military deaths.⁷

Two aspects of the war in the East need a further look: one on the basis of a reevaluation of events long known and the other on the basis of very important new information. The point that, like most authors, I have not stressed sufficiently is the general strategic significance for the course of the war on the Eastern Front as well as elsewhere of the success of the British in crushing the pro-Axis revolt in Iraq in May 1941 and the subsequent conquest of Syria from its Vichy French defenders. Had it been possible for the Germans to establish firm bases in either or both locations – as they very much hoped and as both Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Iraq and the Vichy French authorities in Syria were quite willing to provide – the implications for subsequent developments would have been enormous. Could the Red Army have held in the Caucasus in 1942 with a German base in their rear and also in a position to cut the supply route through Iran? Would the Japanese have grasped the possibility of a meeting with their European ally in reality as opposed to the theoretical speculations on this subject?

An entirely different aspect of the war in the East has come to light with the declassification in 1996 of the British intercepts of reports by units of the German Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) on large-scale shooting of Jews in newly occupied portions of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. It turns out that essentially from the beginning of the campaign in the East, these units, containing about fifteen thousand men, were tasked with killing Jews in the same general areas in which until recently it had been believed that it was the *Einsatzgruppen*, the murder squads, that did all or most of the killing. Some had assumed that the approximately two thousand five hundred men of these latter units could hardly have been charged with killing the hundreds of thousands of Jews in the newly occupied Soviet territories, even with the assistance of pogroms by the local population that the Germans hoped for. Now that we know that close to twenty thousand men were engaged in the mass killing from the summer of 1941 on, the likelihood that they were so instructed before the invasion is far more likely – and the evidence was so read by the British government in the fall of 1941.⁸ This fits with the information

⁶ David M. Glantz, *Zhukov's Greatest Defeat: The Red Army's Epic Disaster in Operation Mars, 1942* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), and other books by the same author.

⁷ G. F. Krivosheev (ed.), *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill, 1997); Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärischen Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999).

⁸ Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998).

in the even more recently released early interrogations of Otto Ohlendorf, the head of one of the murder squads.⁹ This last is one of the mass of documents declassified as a result of the work of the Interagency Working Group established to implement the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure and Imperial Japanese Government Records laws of 1998 and 2000.¹⁰ Additional information on aspects of the war can be expected to emerge as scholars mine these newly accessible materials.

Recent years have seen other important works on the systematic killing of Jews using both newly accessible materials and the essential recognition of the centrality of this aim to the German conduct of the war. While some of these works have added to the understanding of the German army's role in what has come to be called the Holocaust, others have traced the process of German decision making or the involvement of local collaborators in the murder program.¹¹ It is safe to assume that there will be considerable further work by scholars on this facet of wartime developments.¹²

The fighting in North Africa continues to draw the attention of both scholars and the public, but beyond adding detail and local color, new works have not altered our understanding of the course of events. The relationship of that campaign to the survival of the Jewish community in the British Mandate of Palestine is never considered. That Erwin Rommel was given by Hitler an estate stolen from the local Jewish community is mentioned but never related to the expectation that his conquest of Palestine was to enable the Germans to kill all Jews there before turning the area over to Italy. Similarly, the significance of control of the Indian Ocean for the ability of the British Eighth Army to be reinforced and supplied remains as absent from the new literature as it was from the old.¹³ Of importance for an understanding of subsequent events in the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe is a newly located document on Hitler's reaction to the Axis defeat in Tunisia in May 1943.¹⁴ It sheds light on both Hitler's concern about the situation in Italy and his early interest in

⁹ The newly released material is cited in Hilary C. Earl, "Accidental Justice: The Trial of Otto Ohlendorf and the Einsatzgruppen Leaders in Nuremberg, Germany, 1948–1958," PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2002.

¹⁰ See the pieces by professional historians prepared for the IWG and published in Richard Breitman et al., *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Donald M. McKale, *Hitler's Shadow War: The Holocaust and World War II* (New York: Cooper Square, 2002); Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Walter Manoschek, "Serbien ist judenfrei": *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993).

¹² Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹³ An example is John Bierman and Colin Smith, *The Battle of Alamein: Turning Point, World War II* (New York: Viking, 2002).

¹⁴ Kapitän zur See Rolf Junge an Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, May 15, 1943, Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv Freiburg, RM 7/260, f. 197, kindly provided to me by Professor Bernd Wegner.

a German military occupation of Hungary, an operation that would actually come ten months later in March 1944.

The war in Europe in 1944 has certainly attracted much attention from scholars. The question whether the Red Army's halt before Warsaw during the Polish uprising there was a deliberate choice to enable the Germans to crush forces loyal to the Polish Government-in-Exile or the result of unrelated military and logistical developments at the front will continue to agitate people interested in those dramatic events. Since the Red Army crossed the Vistula both above and below Warsaw, and since Stalin refused landing rights to British and American planes trying to bring supplies to the Poles fighting in the city's streets, I remain convinced of the former interpretation.

The publication of the diary of Georgi Dimitrov, a close associate of Stalin's, provides new insights into that leader's thinking about many aspects of events during the war. We thus see Stalin suspicious about Yugoslav Marshal Tito's negotiations with the Germans.¹⁵ This is especially ironic in view of the ongoing argument about Churchill's shifting of support to Tito being or not being influenced by a Soviet mole in the British SOE intelligence organization.

The fighting in the West in 1944 has been the subject of much study in England and the United States even though it was on a far smaller scale than the struggle in the East. Recent work on the Normandy invasion certainly adds to our understanding of that key event, but it hardly alters the general picture.¹⁶ An exception may be the successful American defeat of the German counter-offensive at Mortain, which owed less to signals intelligence than has previously been believed.¹⁷ The attention devoted to the siege of Bastogne and the role of the 101st Airborne Division in that fight has unjustifiably overshadowed the critical part that the 7th Armored Division played in the defense of St. Vith at the northern front of the German offensive, but no one has managed to minimize Field Marshal Montgomery's foolishness in his public claiming of success when it was actually his failure to drive into the German bulge from the North that enabled so much of the attacking force to avoid encirclement. The German winter offensive further south, Operation Northern Wind (Nordwind), has begun to receive more attention but is still not properly fitted into the broader picture. An interesting aspect of all these battles is that, contrary to much literature claiming some sort of superiority

¹⁵ Ivo Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933–1949* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 267–68.

¹⁶ Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Russell R. Hart, *Clash of Arms: How the Allies Won in Normandy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

¹⁷ Mark J. Reardon, *Victory at Mortain: Stopping Hitler's Panzer Counteroffensive* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

for the fighting ability of the German army, in many cases American infantry in inferior numbers and without adequate armored support held and then defeated the German units they faced.

The war at sea continues to receive the attention it deserves, but in this case also details improve our understanding but do not appear to call for any major revisions. The point that has been too frequently overlooked is that the enormous resource allocation by the Germans to the construction of hundreds of submarines created a significant drain on Germany's ability to produce the tanks and guns that its forces fighting on the Eastern Front so desperately needed. The air war has recently attracted much attention in Germany because of the way it enables some to imagine the German people as victims in the war. Rather than recognize the foolishness of insisting on building an air force in violation of treaty and law in a world without heavy bombers, those in the glass house who threw bombs as well as stones claimed astonishment when others shifted from dropping leaflets to also dropping bombs. This story may not be accurate but it is telling: A few German soldiers entered the Paris studio of Pablo Picasso in the summer of 1940 and saw there some of his preliminary sketches for his famous picture "The Bombing of Guernica." One of the soldiers asked, "So you did this?" and Picasso answered, "No, you did."

Two aspects of the air war have received important new studies. Tami Davis Biddle has looked into the way in which the theory and practice of strategic bombing developed in the years between the two wars and during the conflict itself.¹⁸ The very large and important role of German anti-aircraft defenses from the prewar period into the last days of fighting is brought out in a book by Edward Westermann.¹⁹ On the German last-minute recruitment of kids and the elderly into a sort of home guard militia, the Volkssturm, as well as the preparations for a largely failed underground movement in occupied Germany, there are now excellent studies.²⁰ In this connection, we can also see more clearly how the Western Allies came to believe in a serious German effort to hold out for a considerable period of time in a southern redoubt and why General Eisenhower was influenced by that possibility.²¹

¹⁸ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Edward B. Westermann, *Flak: German Anti-Aircraft Defenses, 1914-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

²⁰ David K. Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm: The Nazi Militia and the Fall of Germany, 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Perry Biddiscombe, *Werewolf! The History of the National Socialist Guerilla Movement, 1944-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

²¹ Timothy Naftali, "Creating the Myth of the Alpenfestung: Allied Intelligence and the Collapse of the Nazi Police State," in Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds.), *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, Vol. 5, *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), pp. 203-46.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor continues to attract conspiracy theorists without producing a shred of evidence – an obvious sign for the theorists that the conspiracy was diabolically clever. The critical point that has escaped all too many observers is the connection between two factors for which the evidence has long been available. On the one hand there are the records declassified in the 1970s that show how the intercepts of German messages to their submarines in the Atlantic were utilized to avoid incidents – when they could as easily have been utilized to create incidents on an almost daily basis. On the other hand, there is the enormous amount of time that President Roosevelt personally invested in the endless negotiations with Japan. It was clearly his hope that if the Japanese government could be stalled until those in Tokyo could see the Germans losing rather than winning, they would stay out of jumping into a wider war on the losing side. The converse of this tactic – which came within two weeks of working – has been illuminated by new information on the German side. It has become clear that one reason Hitler drove the German army forward on the Eastern Front toward Moscow in late November–early December 1941 was precisely because he was afraid that the Japanese – whom he had been urging forward for months – might not take the plunge.²² In this context it is easier to understand the enthusiasm that Hitler expressed to Joseph Goebbels, as revealed by the newly published portions of the latter's diary, about Japan's action as well as Hitler's own immediate order to initiate hostilities with the United States.²³

On the immediately following events of the war in the Pacific there is what might be called a developing consensus on some issues. The refusal to allow the bombers, sent to the Philippines in the hope of deterring a Japanese attack, to fly missions against the Japanese as soon as Manila heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor as well as the prior shift of the defensive plans for Luzon from Bataan to the beaches are both seen as serious errors of judgment by General Douglas MacArthur. On the other hand, his role in stabilizing the situation in Australia in 1942 by his arrival there when the country was seriously concerned about a Japanese invasion, as well as his role in pushing hard for the allocation of American resources to the defense of Australia and America's route to it, can increasingly be seen as both positive and significant. This point was especially important when some of Australia's own forces were retained in the Mediterranean theater and in effect had to

²² Notes by General Walter Scherff published in Marianne Feuersenger, *Im Vorzimmer der Macht: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Wehrmachtsführungsstab und Führerhauptquartier, 1940–1945* (Munich: Herbig, 1999), p. 110. See also Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon (eds.), *The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside the Japanese Plans* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, 2000); and Henry C. Clausen and Bruce Lee, *Pearl Harbor: Final Judgement* (New York: Crown, 1992).

²³ Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil II, Band 2, Oktober–Dezember 1941* (Munich: Saur, 1996).

be replaced by units from the United States. There are certainly new studies of several of MacArthur's campaigns as well as of the fighting on and around Guadalcanal, but these generally add detail rather than revise the existing picture.²⁴

It has long been evident that by regularly underestimating Japanese strength at points to be attacked, MacArthur's chief of intelligence, General Charles Willoughby, provided stiff competition for the head of German military intelligence on the Eastern Front from 1942 to 1945, General Reinhard Gehlen, for the title of stupidest intelligence chief of World War II. A very careful analysis of the intelligence operation supporting the second avenue of attack toward Tokyo, that of Admiral Chester Nimitz across the Central Pacific, reveals where and when that intelligence succeeded and when it fell short.²⁵ It thus becomes easier to understand why the assaults on the Marshall Islands, Guam, and Tinian were substantially less difficult than those on Saipan, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa turned out to be.

Our understanding of the long fight for Burma has been enriched by a fine study of the way in which the Indian Army rebuilt itself after the initial disasters in that exceptionally difficult theater of war.²⁶ None of the works that deal with the Indian collaborator with Japan, Subhas Chandra Bose, or his Indian National Army has engaged either Bose's reaction to German mass killing of Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) because their ancestors came from India or the reaction of the soldiers in his army to the sex slaves kidnapped in Japanese-occupied lands and held in enclosures attached to the camps in which they were being trained to follow their Japanese comrades in the occupation of India.

Recent studies certainly enrich our understanding of the naval battle in the Philippines in October 1944. One of these underlines the extraordinary achievement of the destroyer and escort carrier crews in defending the American landing on Leyte while Admiral Halsey was away chasing Japanese decoys.²⁷ Detailed examinations of the fight on Iwo Jima and events on the

²⁴ William H. Bartsch, *December 8, 1941: MacArthur's Pearl Harbor* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2003); Harry Gailey, *MacArthur Strikes Back: Decision at Buna, New Guinea 1942-1943* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 2000), and other works by the same author; Thomas E. Griffith, Jr., *MacArthur's Airman: General George C. Kenney and the War in the Southwest Pacific* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Stephen R. Taaffe, *MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

²⁵ Jeffrey M. Moore, *Spies for Nimitz: Joint Military Intelligence in the Pacific War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2004).

²⁶ Daniel P. Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Indian Army in the Burma Campaign* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003).

²⁷ James D. Hornfischer, *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the U.S. Navy's Finest Hour* (New York: Bantam, 2004). Important for the war in the Pacific in general, Carl Boyd and Akihiko Yoshida, *The Japanese Submarine Force and World War II* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

nearby island of Chichi Jima serve to underline the fierce nature of the struggle for and about those islands in early 1945.²⁸

Considerable quantities of printer's ink have been lavished on the final stage of the war in the Pacific. A series of serious and careful analyses of the plans for the invasion of Japan reinforce the views of those who have held that shocking Japan into surrender by the dropping of two atomic bombs saved both vast numbers of American lives and even larger numbers of Japanese lives that would have been lost in the battles that the Japanese army leadership hoped would discourage the United States from insisting on an occupation and trials of war criminals.²⁹ Two aspects of the war that even these studies have not taken sufficiently into account belong in this context. One is that in addition to the approximately seven hundred thousand American casualties anticipated in Operation Olympic, the landing on Kyushu, there would have been very large numbers of casualties from the sending of American troops through a battlefield drenched by the fallout of the atomic bombs that were to be dropped in tactical support of the landing at a time when this aspect of atomic weapons was not yet understood.³⁰ The other factor that is generally neglected in the literature is that of the fighting elsewhere in the Pacific, on the mainland of China, and in Southeast Asia. Tunnel vision concentrated on the atomic bombs has led to the screening out of the continued fighting in the Philippines, the planned landings on Java and Malaya, and at numerous other places where Allied forces were engaged in fierce fighting with the Japanese. Similarly absent from most books on the end of the war in East Asia is any discussion of the fate of the great numbers of Allied prisoners of war whose murder had been ordered by Japanese headquarters in Tokyo.

There is now additional information on the home fronts of the major belligerents. We have a better insight into the way in which the Soviets mobilized their resources for the great conflict, and it is now apparent that Germany drew more women into the war effort than has hitherto been believed. On the other hand, there is still neither a comprehensive study of the hundreds of thousands of women who served in the Red Army nor any analysis of German records to determine to what extent the order to kill all captured women soldiers was actually carried out.

²⁸ Derrick Wright, *The Battle for Iwo Jima 1945* (Thrupp, Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1999); Chester G. Hearn, *Sorties into Hell: The Hidden War on Chichi Jima* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003).

²⁹ John R. Skates, *The Invasion of Japan: Alternative to the Bomb* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Thomas B. Allen and Norman Polmar, *Code-Name Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan – and Why Truman Dropped the Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999).

³⁰ Edward J. Drea, *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), chap. 11.

The issues of collaboration and resistance in areas occupied for some time by the Germans, Italians, and Japanese, issues that were heavily loaded with emotions, myths, and deliberate distortions for decades, are beginning to be examined in a more objective manner. It is probably safe to predict that future decades will see increasingly balanced treatments of these sensitive matters. This is also the situation in regard to the confiscation, sale, and resale of works of art and other assets taken not only from Jews but also from non-Jewish individuals and museums during hostilities and occupation. The social changes that were hastened or retarded by the war are also likely to see further exploration.

Records on intelligence operations of the belligerents are slowly being declassified, but there is still a long way to go. This is especially true for the intelligence, counter-intelligence, and code-breaking operations of the Soviets.³¹ Since the relevant records in all the archives are on paper that is deteriorating and will disintegrate entirely before many more years pass, one can only hope that they will be opened and microfilmed before they disappear forever. The process of deterioration that is tied to the quality of wartime paper threatens to cut off those who still guard them from their own history. For this reason, every step toward additional openings should be welcomed by people who are interested in the war that shook the world and its inhabitants on an unprecedented scale.*

Gerhard L. Weinberg
October 2004

³¹ Robert W. Stephan, *Stalin's Secret War: Soviet Counterintelligence against the Nazis, 1941-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), is a good start in this difficult field.

* There are, of course, large numbers of useful and important works that have been published in the last twelve years but are not cited here.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

When you go home
Tell them of us, and say:
For your tomorrow,
We gave our today.

This text is inscribed on a memorial to British soldiers who were killed in one of the most desperate but least known battles of World War II: the fighting around the town of Kohima in eastern India not far from the border with Burma, from which a Japanese army had set out to march to Delhi in 1944. At Kohima, Indian and English soldiers had defeated a Japanese force which was followed by some Indians who believed that the Japanese treated the people of their colonial empire, such as the Koreans, far better than the British treated theirs. The leader of those Indians who believed that a victory of Japan and Germany over Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union was greatly to be desired was a man named Subhas Chandra Bose. He had fled from India to Germany across the Soviet Union during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and had had an opportunity to see for himself in Europe how kindly the Germans were disposed toward those they conquered until, in 1943, the Germans sent him by submarine to the Indian Ocean where he had transferred to a Japanese submarine for the rest of the trip to East Asia.

This series of inter-related events may serve to illustrate why it has seemed to me to be appropriate to try to write an account of World War II which looks at it in a global perspective. For the origins of that vast conflict, I believed it both appropriate and possible to pursue a theme which might serve to tie the whole complicated story together; it appeared convincing to me that the foreign policy of Hitler's Germany provided such a theme. I stated in the preface of the first of my two volumes on that subject:

Whatever the conflicting ambitions, rivalries and ideologies of the world's powers in the 1920s and 1930s, it is safe to assert that, with the solitary exception of Germany, no European nation considered another world war as a conceivable answer to whatever problems confronted it. Local wars and conflicts, specific aggressive moves or attempts at subversion, miscalculations leading to hostilities – all these were conceivable, and most of them occurred. But without German initiative another world-wide holocaust was inconceivable to contemporaries in all countries and is unimaginable retrospectively for the historian. Accordingly, the course of German foreign policy provides the obvious organizing principle for any account of the origins of World War II.

But once the Germans initiated hostilities in September, 1939, the conflict took a course of its own. German initiatives dominated its early stages, but even then not always in the way that its architects had anticipated. In the summer of 1940 the European war was already taking on forms far different from those confidently planned in Berlin. And the entrance of Japan into the wider conflict, though ardently desired and long urged by the Germans, dramatically altered the dimensions and nature of the war. Certainly the Japanese would never have expanded the war with China which they had been waging since 1937 into a portion of the wider conflict had it not been for the great German victories in the West in 1940. Without those victories, the East Asian fighting, however terrible for those involved and especially for the vast numbers of Chinese killed in it, would have remained an isolated war like that Japan and China had fought in 1894-95. But once Japan decided that the opportunity for the seizure of an enormous empire in Southeast Asia had come, none of the participants could operate in the world-wide conflagration as it preferred; all had to adjust to the necessities – even the terrors – of the moment.

It is in the face of the resulting complexity of the struggle that it seems to me impossible to draw out a single unifying theme. On the other hand, too many of the existing accounts treat the war either from quite parochial perspectives or by dealing with different geographical areas as if one were an appendage of another. It is the special and peculiar characteristic of the upheaval which shook the world between 1939 and 1945 that dramatic events were taking place *simultaneously* in different portions of the globe; decision makers faced enormous varieties of decisions at one and the same time, and repercussions in areas far distant from those of any specific crisis or issue before them had constantly to be kept in mind.

It is with this global point of view that I have tried to review the war as a whole with special emphasis on the inter-relationships between the various theaters and the choices faced by those in positions of leadership.

That has meant that the bloody details of fighting, of the seemingly endless struggle for control of the seas, and the interminable tedium of war broken by moments of sheer terror, may all appear to have been sanitized or at least obscured. If such is the effect, it was not the intent. But there are far more books which convincingly convey the immediacy of the fighting than those that survey the broader picture.

A further special problem appears to me to affect much of the literature on the war. It is too frequently forgotten that those who had choices and decisions to make were affected by memories of the *preceding* war of 1914-18, not by the Cold War, the Vietnam conflict, or other issues through which we look back on World War II. They did not know, as we do, how the war would come out. They had their hopes – and fears – but none of the certainty that retrospective analysis all too often imposes on situations in which there were alternatives to consider, all of them fraught with risks difficult to assess at the time.

The effort to present the war in a global perspective, looking forward rather than backward, and to do so at least in part on the basis of extensive research in the archives, has been challenging. It could not possibly have been accomplished without a great deal of help. The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded me a fellowship which enabled me to initiate the research for this book, and the Rockefeller Foundation Conference and Study Center at Bellagio provided the opportunity to review the findings of that initial foray into the archives. Those forays had been substantially assisted by earlier fellowships of the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies. Archivists at the National Archives in Washington as well as the National Records Center in Suitland, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library at Hyde Park, the U.S. army's Center for Military History, the Public Record Office at Kew on the outskirts of London, the Imperial War Museum Library and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College in London, the German Foreign Ministry Archive in Bonn, the German Federal Archive in Koblenz and its Military Archive in Freiburg, the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, and the Center for Research on the History of National Socialism in Hamburg were invariably courteous and helpful to what must have seemed to them an extremely demanding, persistent, and at times difficult customer. The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust has made much of the research travel possible and has been helpful in innumerable other ways.

The Houghton Library at Harvard allowed access to the William Phillips papers; the papers of Jay Pierrepont Moffat were made accessible by his widow, Mrs. Albert Lévitte. Many scholars have enlightened

me by discussion and by providing specific information; I would especially like to thank Josef Anderle, Richard Breitman, Michael Gannon, the late Louis Morton, Richard Soloway, Stephen Schuker and Robert Wolfe. Work on the War Documentation Project of Columbia University and, later, the American Historical Association's project for microfilming captured German documents afforded me an unequalled opportunity to familiarize myself with masses of German archival material.

Crown copyrighted quotations from the collections at the Public Record Office are used with the kind permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives have agreed to my quoting from the papers of Lord Ismay and of Lord Alanbrooke in their custody.

When I began work on this book in 1978, my late wife Wilma was already fighting the cancer which took her life; she not only insisted I go forward with this project but spent many hours copying portions of documents for me in Freiburg. At a very difficult time in my life, a new light came into it. While I was resuming the writing of this book, the lovely lady to whom this book is dedicated came to share in the travails of its completion. And her mother, Lois Kabler, transformed hundreds of pages of my hieroglyphs into the word processor; surely a mother-in-law story to warm the heart. An extraordinary copyeditor, Margaret Sharman, has caught numerous slips. It is my hope that readers will take the trouble to call errors to my attention so that they might be corrected in any future edition. Many have been kind enough to do so, and it has been possible to make corrections in this printing. All remaining mistakes are, of course, my responsibility.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA Auswärtiges Amt. The German Foreign Ministry: used to designate the archive of the Foreign Ministry in Bonn. Followed in the citation by the section of the archive, title and number of the volume, and a frame number stamped on the document if these are provided.

ADAP Akten zur Deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. The German language edition of documents mainly from the German Foreign Ministry files, cited by series letter, volume number, and document number.

BA Bundesarchiv. The German Federal Archive in Koblenz. Followed in the citation by the collection and folder designations.

BA/MA Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv. The Military Archive Branch in Freiburg of the German Federal Archive. Followed in the citation by the collection and folder number. All “N” citations are from collections of private papers deposited in the archive.

Bd. Band. Volume number of a series in the German Foreign Ministry archive.

CEH Central European History

DRuZW Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. The German official history of World War II being published by the Military History Research Office in Freiburg.

f. Folio(s), used for pagination on a document in an archive, frequently helpful when a group of documents has been bound together and then given folio numbers by archivists.

FDRL Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

fr. Frame, indicates frame number either on microfilm or stamped on a document prior to microfilming.

FRUS Foreign Relations of the United States. The main series of U.S.

documents published by the Department of State; the volumes are cited by year, and volume number for that year or special title.

GPO Government Printing Office, used where the U.S. Government Printing Office is either the publisher or distributor of a book. This includes books which were originally issued by the historical offices of the U.S. army and air force.

Hamburg, Research Center Forschungsstelle für die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus in Hamburg. A research institute in Hamburg with some archival holdings, cited by the system used there.

HMSO His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office, the British government's official printing office.

Hung. Docs. Hungarian Documents. The set published by the Hungarian government and containing, in addition to the texts in Magyar, a summary of each document in German.

Imperial War Museum A museum and research library in London.

IMT International Military Tribunal.

IMTFE International Military Tribunal for the Far East.

Institut für Zeitgeschichte Institute for Contemporary History, Munich.

JCH *Journal of Contemporary History*

JMH *Journal of Modern History*

KTB Halder Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed.), *Generaloberst Halder, Kriegstagebuch*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart:/Kohlhammer, 1962-64). War Diary of General Halder.

KTB OKW *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, War diary of the high command of the armed forces.

KTB Skl *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung*. Diary of the high command of the navy. Citations are followed by the Part number (almost always A), the volume number, and the date. Cited from the originals in Freiburg, these volumes are currently being published, but the references as given here can be used to locate material in both.

MGM *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*. This important journal is published by the German Military History Research Office in Freiburg.

MR Map Room. A section of the Roosevelt Library.

NA National Archives. The main American depository. The records cited are from the main building in downtown Washington and the National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland, but many are likely to be moved to the Archives II building located in College Park, Maryland.

To avoid confusion, location as between the two existing buildings is not given.

OF Official File. A segment of the files at the Roosevelt Library.

PRO Public Record Office. The main British depository. All those cited are located in the new building in Kew. The letters and first number following PRO constitute the "Class" of the file and are followed, after a slash, by the folder number.

PSF President's Secretary's File. A segment of the files at the Roosevelt Library.

RG Record Group. The designation of major segments of the holdings of the U.S. National Archives.

St.S. Staatssekretär. State-Secretary, used in designating citations from that part of the German Foreign Ministry archive called the Büro Staatssekretär.

TMWC Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, 42 vols. (Nürnberg: The Tribunal, 1946-48).

USSBS United States Strategic Bombing Survey. Used for the author of publications emanating from this agency.

U.St.S. Unterstaatssekretär. Special title of the head of the political division of the German Foreign Ministry, used for a section of the records of the AA.

VjZ Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte. Major journal published by the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich.

ZS Zeugenschrifttum. Depositions by witnesses, a collection at the Institute for Contemporary History.

ZSg. Zeitgeschichtssammlung. Collection on recent history. A designation for several collections of papers at the German Federal Archive.

INTRODUCTION

Although this book contains a chapter on the background of World War II, it defines that war as beginning in 1939 in Europe. While some have argued that the war was merely a continuation of World War I after a temporary interruption created by the armistice of 1918, and that the whole period from 1914 to 1945 should be seen as the age of a new European civil war, a Thirty-one Years War if you will, such a perspective ignores not only the very different origins and nature of the prior conflict but obscures instead of illuminating the special character of the second one. If an important by-product of both wars was the weakening of Europe and its hold on the world, the *intentions* of the belligerents were fundamentally different. It is true that these changed somewhat in the course of each of these lengthy struggles, but a basic differentiation remains.

In World War I, the two sides were fighting over their relative roles in the world, roles defined by possible shifts in boundaries, colonial possessions, and military and naval power. It is true that the Austro-Hungarian empire anticipated the elimination of Serbia's independent status, and Germany very quickly came to the conclusion that Belgium would never regain its independence, but beyond this expected disappearance of two of the smaller states which had emerged from larger constructions during the nineteenth century, the other powers—and most especially the major ones—were all expected to survive, even if trimmed by the winners. In this sense, the war, however costly and destructive in its *methods*, was still quite traditional in its aims.

It is also true that the fighting itself, with its unprecedented casualties, its incredible costs, the appearance of such new weapons as poison gas, airplanes, tanks, and submarines, as well as vast shifts in world economic patterns, ended up completely transforming the pre-war world and doing so in ways that none of the belligerents had anticipated. The effects on winners and losers alike were colossal, and the pre-war world could not

be revived even if some made valiant and sometimes counter-productive efforts to do so. But neither side had either intended or preferred the massive changes which resulted from the ability of the modern state to utilize the social and mechanical technologies developed in the preceding two centuries to draw vast human and material resources out of their respective societies and employ them—and thereby use them up—in the cauldron of battle.

In World War II, all this was very different indeed. The *intent* was different from the start. A total reordering of the globe was at stake from the very beginning, and the leadership on both sides recognized this. The German dictator Adolf Hitler had himself explicitly asserted on May 23, 1939, that the war he intended would be not for the Free City of Danzig but for living space in the East; his Foreign Minister similarly assured Italy's Foreign Minister that it was war, not Danzig, that Germany wanted. When Germany had conquered Poland and offered a temporary peace to Britain and France, those countries responded by making it clear, as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain explained, that there could be no agreement with a German government led by Hitler, a man who had regularly broken his promises. If Chamberlain, who has often been derided for allegedly not grasping the true nature of the National Socialist challenge, saw the issues so clearly, the historian decades later ought not to close his or her eyes to the reality of a very different war. This was, in fact, a struggle not only for control of territory and resources but about who would live and control the resources of the globe and which peoples would vanish entirely because they were believed inferior or undesirable by the victors.

It was in this way that the two wars which originated in Europe differed greatly from each other even if separated by only two decades, and it was also in this way that the European war which began in 1939 differed from those initiated by Japan in China in 1931 and 1937 and the one waged by Italy against Ethiopia in 1935–36. However grim for the participants, and especially for the Chinese and Ethiopians, those wars, too, belonged in a prior framework. Both the first and the second stages of Japan's aggression against China were a resumption of a pattern of imperial expansion which Japan had initiated in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Designed to expand its resource and power base at the expense of China, these efforts looked to the expansion of Japanese power, not the disappearance of China—to say nothing of the total disappearance of the Chinese.

Similarly, Italy's invasion and occupation of Ethiopia was the last of a series of European wars for the control of portions of the African continent, a colonial war in the tradition of earlier seizures of African

territory by the Spanish and Portuguese, British and French, Dutch and Belgians, Germans and the Italians themselves. It is for this reason that the account of war offered in this work begins with the German attack on Poland, not the prior fighting in East Asia or Africa. Those other struggles would become merged with the one that began on September 1, 1939, but they had begun quite independently of it and would have remained both separate and different had not Germany launched a new type of war which came to absorb them.

The focus of this book, therefore, is on the war initiated by Germany in September 1939. It attempts to cover it until the defeat of Germany and those who became its associates, and since these came to include Japan, until that country's surrender in 1945 as well. The fighting of that war ranged and raged over all the oceans, including even the Arctic ones, and touched every continent. Although most of the combat occurred in Europe, Asia, and Africa, such Australian cities as Darwin were repeatedly bombed and the Western Hemisphere was subjected not only to Japanese invasion in the north but to a silent assault by thousands of balloons carrying incendiaries and explosives to the western parts of Canada and the United States. It was, therefore, a war which reached further around the globe than any which had ever preceded it.

Furthermore, the extent of destruction was very much greater, and spread over vastly larger areas, than in any prior war, while the loss of life was at least twice that of the war of 1914-18. Contemporaries of that earlier struggle were so impressed by its destructiveness of both life and property, as well as by the vast lands and populations it engulfed, that they had quite early come to call it "The Great War," a name by which its survivors recalled it when they did not instead refer to it as "The World War." Both by comparison with that terrible event, and when set against all other wars of which we have any knowledge, the second world-wide conflagration of this century surely deserves to be called "The Greatest War." Only an all-out nuclear war could ever be yet greater, and there would presumably be no historian left alive to record it—to say nothing of any records for a reconstruction of its course.

The account offered here is designed to try to illuminate the war in all its major aspects and theaters, with particular attention to the major decisions and choices made by the participants. There has, therefore, been little room for the details of combat on land and in the struggles for control of the skies and the seas. The emphasis is on the why? rather than the how? of war. If some incidents, like the fight over Madagascar or the campaign in Burma, receive more attention here than might be expected, this is precisely because they have been neglected in most broader surveys of the war. A deliberate attempt has been made to allot

to the terrible fighting on the Eastern Front the attention it deserves in the framework of the war as a whole; and if the resulting account is still not as lengthy and detailed as the role of that front in the over-all picture of the war merits, it is still very much more extensive than in other Western surveys.

Similarly, an effort has been made to integrate the use of intelligence into the narrative of policies and operations and to try to relate the events in widely separated parts of the globe to each other. This has meant some rapid shifting of geographic focus within individual chapters, but the processes of a world-wide conflict do not always lend themselves to easy dissection into conveniently separated narratives. It has, nevertheless, seemed useful to draw together in special chapters discussion of the evolution of new weapons and procedures during the whole war, and to survey the fate of the belligerents in the throes of hostilities. A certain amount of duplication is inevitable between the two thematic chapters and the chronological account, but it may be found helpful to have some material both integrated into the record of the war and that of nations and their weapons.

Certain peculiarities of the text call for explanation. I have decided to use the old rather than the new spelling of Chinese personal and place names; all contemporary maps and records use them, and the substitution of the spelling introduced in the 1970s will only lead to useless searching in much of the existing literature. For Japanese names, the Japanese sequence, which places the family name first, is used at all times except only where the title of a book or article includes it in the reverse order. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. There is a certain arbitrariness in the utilization of place names which have changed as a result of territorial and other changes stemming from the war. As a general rule, the names used at the time will be found in this book; that is certainly in no way to be taken as a reflection on the propriety of subsequent boundaries. References to "England" may in some cases be interpreted as meaning the whole of Britain.

Two types of annotations have been separately marked and printed. Those which relate directly to the text and should be read with it have been marked by letters in the text and are located at the bottom of the page. Notes which are of a more technical nature are marked with numerals and are printed at the end of the book. These contain references to archival documents, discussion of and references to secondary literature, and they occasionally deal with controversial issues of interpretation and other related questions. For both footnotes and endnotes there is a list of abbreviations and special terms on pp. xvii–xix.

It has not seemed either sensible or useful to include a detailed bibliography, which would necessarily provide literally thousands of items. Anyone who works on World War II will be inclined to believe that the prophet Koheleth in asserting that “of making many books there is no end” must have been looking ahead to that event. All works directly cited in the notes have been provided with full citations the first time they appear. The bibliographic essay is designed to provide the interested reader with some of the most important works, in some instances with my comments. Such a listing cannot possibly be exhaustive; it may, however, both point to relevant literature and provide additional references through the bibliographies contained in most of the books concerned.

It has, similarly, seemed to me pointless to append a list of the thousands of archival folders and rolls of microfilm which have been scrutinized in the preparation of this book. Specific archival references will be found in the notes wherever this is appropriate, and a very short discussion of the archives is included in the bibliographic essay. Only those who have themselves toiled in the vast and often confusing records of the war can have a sense of the extent to which the scholar is dependent on the “kindness of strangers.” I can attest for the benefit of any readers, who may be tempted by reading this account to work in the records themselves, that those strangers quickly become valued friends.

1

FROM ONE WAR TO ANOTHER

When a German warship opened fire on the Polish garrison in the special area reserved for them within the Free City of Gdansk (Danzig)—and German troops and airplanes attacked Poland—a terrible conflict began that was quickly called “The Second World War.” This name implies some relationship to the great prior conflict of 1914–18. At the beginning of September 1939, when German actions started this new war, however, there was already fighting in two other areas of the globe. Since the Japanese had struck in northern China in July 1937, there had been hostilities between the two East Asian nations; that war had reached something of a stalemate by the fall of 1939, but no end to it was in sight. In addition, since May 1939, Japanese and Russian troops were engaged in bitter fighting on the border of their respective puppet states in a conflict called after its location the Nomonhan Incident by the Japanese and the Khalkhin-gol Incident by the Russians. Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Japan continued even while their forces clashed, and a cease-fire in this struggle on September 16, 1939, followed upon Japan’s defeat in battle. The continuing East Asian conflict between Japan and China would, however, have remained isolated, like the war those two nations had fought in 1894–95, had not events in Europe led Japan to join the hostilities begun there. It is thus entirely appropriate to think of the Second World War as having been initiated by Germany and eventually embroiling the whole globe. How did this come about? Was not one world war enough?

The war which ended with the armistice of November 11, 1918, had been horrendous in its impact on the participants. In more than four years of bloodshed and destruction, vast portions of Europe had been wrecked and the domestic institutions of the continent transformed. The capacity of the modern state for mass mobilization had drawn human and material resources out of each belligerent to an

extent no one had previously imagined possible, and these human and material resources had been consumed in the furnace of war. The other portions of the globe had become involved either because they had joined one side or because their colonial status had sucked them in; while the few remaining neutrals saw their trade and their very structures dramatically affected by the great upheaval all around them.

That struggle, which was generally referred to then as “The World War” to distinguish it from the localized or smaller conflicts of preceding decades, was the great formative experience of those who survived it: they would thereafter look at the world through the framework of the lessons they believed that war had taught them. This was as much the case for the victors as for the defeated; and the framing of peace in 1919, the conduct of policy in the two following decades, and the direction of the new war were all the work of individuals who saw and measured new choices by reference to choices made or not made in the great war just concluded.

The peace settlement of 1919 was complicated by a series of compromises primarily among the victors and secondarily between the victors and the defeated. Four major factors in the situation affected these compromises. First, the unanticipated suddenness of the German defeat—coming a year earlier than expected, *after* German victories over the Allies in East, Southeast, and South Europe, and *before* the Allies had invaded Germany herself—meant that there were substantial limits on the choices of the victors and no clear recognition of total military defeat in Germany.

The troops of the victors were not in occupation of all or almost all of Europe, as the Allies had once anticipated, and this limitation on the authority of the victors became ever more significant as the pressures for demobilization in the victorious countries pushed all before them after the years of sacrifice and suffering. This situation meant that in many parts of Europe, especially in eastern and Southeastern Europe, local elements could take the initiative into their own hands. Since Russia had been defeated by the Central Powers, who were in turn defeated by the Western Allies, there was a unique situation in Eastern Europe: the great empires which had contended with each other in prior centuries were on this occasion *all* defeated, and the smaller powers and peoples of the area had their one opportunity to try to assert their own will, and at times to do so in defiance of the victors writing the peace treaties in the far-away suburbs of Paris.

This same circumstance, the early and unanticipated German defeat, left the people of that country dazed by events. A succession of great

victories had led the Germans to anticipate possible total victory; the bitter, drawn-out fighting and the deprivations imposed on Germany's home front had led some Germans in the latter part of the war to fear or to hope for a compromise of some sort; but almost no one expected a total defeat. The decision of Germany's military leaders to call for an end to the fighting in September 1918 rather than risk a collapse at the front meant that the guns stopped firing when the war maps still showed German troops deep inside the territory of Germany's enemies. The shock of being told that the war was lost almost immediately produced a collapse of the German home front and the disappearance of its dynasties and institutions; and this in turn made the country practically totally defenseless.

The turmoil of a few weeks in the country that had had the most solid home front during the war of all the European belligerents would later be transposed in malice aforethought by some and in subjective honesty by others with the defeat at the front which had actually preceded and caused it.^a The stab-in-the-back legend thus created—the false claim that action at home had caused defeat in battle—would have a large number of fateful effects subsequently, but the immediate result of the German military collapse would be that the victors became more concerned that there should be a government of some sort in Germany to accept the terms of peace than about possible German rejection of whatever was proposed. The victors were indeed prepared to march in and occupy the country if the peace treaty were rejected, but that contingency was correctly believed unlikely to arise.

The second major factor at work in the peace settlement was the desperate fear of German might. The very fact that it had taken most of the world to crush Germany and her allies and then only in a long, bitter, and costly struggle, with Allied defeat averted by the narrowest of margins, suggested that the German state at the center of the continent, newly formed less than half a century earlier, was extraordinarily dangerous to the welfare, even existence, of others. The fact that the victors were meeting in the French capital, which had been threatened by German capture a year earlier and still bore the marks of shelling, guaranteed that no one would forget how narrow the margin of victory had been. Furthermore, the German introduction into combat of what seemed to many people at the time the most horrendous of the new weapons and methods of warfare

^a Such a reversal of events close in time even by those who lived through them is not as uncommon as one might think. An example from American history would be the frequently expressed belief that at the Yalta Conference of February 1945 areas had been turned over to the Soviet Union, when in fact those areas had been liberated or occupied by the Red Army in the preceding months.

only accentuated concern about a continuing menace from that nation. The bombing of cities from the air, unrestricted submarine warfare, and the use of poison gas certainly looked to the victors as innovations the world owed to German genius but might well have done without.

This mixture of fear and hate combined with loathing for Germany's invasion of Belgium, her despicable conduct in that country, and her wanton destruction of French territory as it was evacuated, to suggest the wisdom, indeed the imperative need, for measures to limit German power in the future if other nations were to survive the German experiment of nationhood. Such measures were, however, halted short of eliminating that experiment by a fundamental assumption and principle of the peacemakers, the third of the conditioning elements of the peace settlement. This was the belief that Europe should be organized on the principle of nationality, and that violations of this principle had had a large part in bringing on the war. If one started from this belief—perhaps it would be better to say basic assumption—then certain highly significant implications for any peace settlement would necessarily follow. The first and by far the most important was that there would continue to be a German nation.

As can be seen by any analysis of even the harshest terms proposed by anyone before or during 1919, the continued existence of a German state, however truncated or restricted, was taken for granted by all.¹ The experience of World War II would call this assumption in question, and one major facet of the war aims discussion among the allies who fought against Germany in that second conflict revolved precisely around this issue, but such was not the case in 1919. Although the process of German unification under Prussian leadership had been accompanied by the disappearance of several states which had existed for centuries, and although German war aims in the conflict just over had always included the end at least of Belgium's existence as a really independent state,² not one among the victorious leaders assembled in Paris advocated such a fate for Germany. What arguments there were all revolved around the extent of and the methods for weakening or restraining Germany. This focus of emphasis on the modalities of a continued German state would subsequently blind the Germans to possible alternatives to the peace treaty they were obliged to sign, as effectively as it would conceal from critics of the settlement its single most portentous feature.

The second major implication of the acceptance of some form of the national principle as a basic assumption underlying the settlement was the rejection of any thought of imposing on the smaller nationalities of Central and Eastern Europe some over-arching multinational structure, be it a revised form of the old Austro-Hungarian empire or a federation

newly devised for the occasion. Such an imposition of unity would have required the use of force by the victors, just as division could have been imposed on Germany only by force; but in both cases the assumptions of the victors were consonant with their perception of what was practical. The voluminous records of the deliberations at Paris contain no discussion of an enforced new multinational structure for Central and Southeast Europe, just as they reveal no parallel to the World War II debates about the need for some sort of division of Germany. The new states emerging out of the ruins of the German, Ottoman, Austrian, and Russian empires would have to develop their own independent structures or federative polities as best they could, a process hampered by their national rivalries and great power interference, and terminated—at least for years—by a new war out of which, unlike World War I, a victor in their part of the world would emerge to dominate the area.

The fourth major factor conditioning the peace settlement was the sense shared in some way by all alike that the war had changed the world, and that these changes had to be accommodated to the national interests of the victors—as the leading powers among the victors perceived them—and combined with some new machinery to try to prevent any recurrence of the disaster they had all been through. The changes which were most dramatically obvious at Paris were certain presences and absences. The two countries which had carried the major shares of the burden of fighting on the main front, France and Great Britain, were of course prominently represented at Paris, and so were the other European victors like Italy and Belgium. But while the United States had on occasion played some role in the consideration of European powers before 1914, her participation in the peace conference, as in the war itself, was so different from her presence at the Algeciras Conference on Morocco in 1906, to mention one example from the immediate pre-war period, that it was a difference in kind rather than degree.

The military and financial role of the United States in the war had made her into a world power; and while the ending of the war a year earlier than anticipated had kept that role from being as overwhelming as it would have become a year later, there was here an entirely new factor on the world stage. Joined to the realities of American power were three additional elements enhancing the United States' position. The United States itself had been strengthened, not weakened, by the events of the war; its industrial and actual or potential military power could be expected to become even greater into the distant future; and the articulation by President Woodrow Wilson of American ideals, projected onto the world scene by his oratory, made many look to him and his views as harbingers of a new world order.

Another new power present at Paris was Japan. Though clearly not as important in the war or as likely to play a major role in European affairs, Japan shared with the United States the characteristic of having been strengthened rather than weakened by the war. Furthermore, if the representatives of the United States, like those of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, were non-Europeans participating in the settlement of European issues, these were all individuals of European ancestry. The inclusion of Japan among the great powers brought onto the scene a people who had adapted European material and social technology to their own cultural and political traditions; but who were, who saw themselves, and who were seen by others, as basically non-Western. When as a result of the peace settlement a portion of eastern Germany came to be under the control of the reborn country of Lithuania in order to provide that nation with a good port on the Baltic Sea at Memel (Klaipeda), certain restrictions were placed on the Lithuanian government to protect the rights of the Germans living in that area. Japan was one of the powers designated as monitors for this arrangement.³ It would be difficult to imagine a more conspicuous reversal from the days when German citizens enjoyed extra-territorial rights in Japan to the time when Germans in the Memel territory had to look, among other places, to Tokyo for the protection of their own rights under Lithuanian rule.

One power was as conspicuous by the novelty of its absence as the United States and Japan were by their presence: Russia. One of the original allies in the war against Germany had withdrawn from the conflict. The Tsarist government had been overthrown by revolution early in 1917, and the successor regime which had continued in the war against Germany had in turn itself been overthrown in November of that year by the Bolsheviks, who had then pulled Russia out of the war.⁴ Preferring to consolidate their hold on whatever portions of the country a settlement with Germany would leave them—a decision made easier for them by their belief in the imminence of world-wide revolutionary upheaval and their own prior support from the German government—the Bolsheviks in March 1918 signed a peace treaty dictated by Germany.

This dramatic breach in the alliance against the Central Powers had a host of implications. Inside Russia, it meant a breach between the Bolsheviks and their only internal political allies; from then on they would rule whatever they controlled as a one-party state. Externally it

⁴ The Russians changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar after the revolutions of 1917. By the calendar in effect in Russia at the time, the first revolution took place in February and the second in October; the adoption of the new calendar meant that the first would fall into March and the second into November.

meant the release of German troops for use on other fronts, primarily in the West, in Germany's last great bid for total victory in the war. For the Western Powers it meant a challenge to their domestic institutions, but more immediately it threatened them with utter defeat at Germany's hands. To revive the dispersion of forces imposed on Germany by an Eastern Front, the Western Allies supported those internal Russian enemies of the Bolsheviks who were willing to have Russia return to the war, but these efforts failed. The Western Allies barely held on in the West and then defeated Germany as well as the other Central Powers by themselves. They thereby incidentally saved the Bolsheviks from the fate that a victorious Germany intended for them, but they had no intention of inviting them to the peace conference. Whatever the outcome of the internal upheavals still shaking Russia during the proceedings in Paris, that country would be present in the thoughts of the conferees as an object of hopes and fears, not as a participant.

Two additional novel features of the situation in Paris require comment. One has already been mentioned: the presence of representatives from Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand and, though not with the same status, of India. Here was a first internationally visible sign of one of the major results of World War I, the breakup of the European colonial empires into independent political entities. The "British Dominions," as they were then called, had earned their independence and their right to participate in the proceedings on their own by their share in the fighting. This share was the converse of the declining ability of the mother country to provide by itself the military forces required for victory. For the future, this meant that only with the assured support of these extra-European ex-colonies now turned independent could the European settlement of 1919 be upheld and defended—a matter of crucial importance in 1938 and 1939. It is not an accident of history, though a fact frequently overlooked, that at the turning of the tide in North Africa in 1942 the majority of the "British" forces engaged came not from the United Kingdom but from Britain's allies, that is, from Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa; from what by then was called the "British Commonwealth."

The other novel feature was the general belief that the prevention of any new calamity like the war just concluded required the establishment of new international institutions. The fact that the first part of each of the peace treaties with the defeated was the text of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and that similarly included in the peace settlement were provisions for the establishment of the International Labor Organization and of the World Court, reflected the perception that making peace at the end of such a terrible conflict required more than drawing

new boundaries, arranging for compensations, and imposing other limitations on the defeated. A general additional attempt should be made so to order international affairs as to preclude a repetition of what had just taken place.

These idealistic aspirations—with some justice one might call them the only truly realistic conclusions drawn from the war—were almost certain to be shattered by the other terms of any peace settlement. As the human and material costs of the war had mounted, only the hopes for a better world to follow had sustained much of the enormous effort required of the participants. But the very escalation of sacrifice supported by rising expectations of a new and improved world in the post-war era practically guaranteed disillusionment. How could a world in which over thirty million had lost their lives or their health in combat, in which millions had been uprooted, and in which the ingenuity of advanced industrial societies had for years concentrated on the maximum destruction of the material resources of mankind, be so much improved over the by then shadowy pre-war world, now surrounded with a halo of memory conferred by the intervening horrors?

The higher the hopes raised, the swifter and surer the disappointment. Nothing, measured against the lives lost and suffering endured, was likely to look worth the sacrifices made. And that an even worse fate might have been averted by victory seemed little consolation, especially as with the passage of time the fear of defeat, once so acute, faded from people's minds, but the empty places in the family circle remained conspicuously empty. That under such circumstances most of the disappointment, disillusionment, and disgust born of the war and its aftermath should focus in the first instance not on the war but on the peace settlement should not occasion great surprise.

The terms of the peace imposed on the defeated included, along with the provisions for new international organizations, primarily territorial, military, and financial terms. The territorial arrangement provided for substantial transfers to the victors, with Serbia gaining enormously at the expense of Austria-Hungary and becoming under the name of Yugoslavia a multinational state of its own, Romania gaining at the expense of Hungary and Bulgaria, as well as regaining territory it had lost to Russia in 1878, a new state called Czechoslovakia being formed out of portions of Austria-Hungary, Italy gaining some land also at Austria-Hungary's expense, and Greece being awarded what had been Bulgaria's coast on the Aegean Sea. Germany had to return part of northern Schlesvig to Denmark after a plebiscite, turn over small pieces of land to Belgium, and return Alsace and Lorraine to France.

More traumatic for the Germans for reasons to be examined subsequently was the return to a revived Poland of substantial portions of the territory Prussia had taken from her in the partitions of 1772 and 1793, together with a part of the Silesian lands Prussia had taken from Austria earlier in the eighteenth century. Danzig, the main port of Poland on the Baltic and also grabbed by Prussia in 1793, was not returned to the Poles in spite of the promise of a "free and secure access to the sea" in President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points and sought after initial rejection by Germany as the basis for the peace. The city's overwhelmingly German population led the peacemakers to a compromise: the establishment of a free city whose internal affairs would under international supervision be democratic—and hence controlled by Germans—but whose foreign policy and trade affairs would be subject to Polish control.

A small part of eastern Germany was to be under Lithuania as already mentioned, the Saar area with its coal mines was to be under French control for fifteen years, and all of Germany's colonies were taken from her. These last were, like portions of the collapsed Ottoman empire, placed into a newly devised category of "mandates," territories under the control of various of the victors but not included in their territory or colonies and instead being prepared for self-government at some future time.^a

The military provisions of the treaties imposed severe limits on the size of the armed forces of the defeated, prohibited certain weapons and activities entirely, provided for the demilitarization of German territory west of the Rhine river plus a strip east of it, and instituted a temporary military occupation of the Rhineland to assure adherence to the peace treaty.

The economic provisions of the treaties were drawn to impose on the defeated all the war costs of Belgium together with those costs of the war of the other allies which were still to come, primarily the reconstruction of damage caused by the war and the payments to survivors of those killed in the conflict. These impositions were called "reparations" to distinguish them from the punitive payments, usually called "indemnities," exacted by the victor from the vanquished after prior wars, such as those exacted from France by Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 or by Japan from China after their war in 1894-95.

^a It is the former status of German Southwest Africa as a C-Class mandate of the then Union of South Africa which made what is now known as Namibia an issue of international concern (with the United States' role due to Germany's cession of sovereignty over her colonies to the victors to be assigned by them to mandatory powers).

Since the economies of Germany's European enemies had been damaged much more by the war than her own, this arrangement, if implemented, would have operated at least to some extent to off-set the relative strengthening of the German economy as a result of the war. But this was not to be.

The terms of the peace settlement were attacked vehemently by the Germans at the time and subsequently, and these attacks came to coincide with the general disillusionment about the new world which had emerged from the war and the peace among the former allies. There was a popular delusion, widespread at the time, sedulously fostered in the 1920s and 1930s by German propaganda, generally believed then and remaining the staple pabulum of history textbooks today, that Germany had been most terribly crushed by the peace settlement, that all manner of horrendous things had been done to her, and that a wide variety of onerous burdens and restrictions imposed upon her by the peace had weakened her into the indefinite future. On the basis of this view, a whole series of modifications was made in the settlement, all without exception in favor of Germany. The occupation was ended earlier than the peace treaty indicated, the commissions to supervise disarmament were withdrawn, the reparations payments were reduced and eventually cancelled, and the trials of war criminals were left to the Germans with predictable results, to mention only some of the most significant changes made. If at the end of this process, Germany—a bare quarter of a century after the armistice of 1918—controlled most of Europe and had come within a hair's breadth of conquering the globe, there was obviously something wrong about the picture generally accepted then and later.

The adoption of the national principle as the basis for the peace settlement meant that the most recently created European major power, Germany, would survive the war, her population second in Europe only to Russia's and her industrial and economic potential less affected than that of her European enemies, since it had been on the back of their, not Germany's, economies that the war had been fought out. Though weakened by the war, Germany had been weakened less than her European enemies, and she had thus emerged relatively stronger potentially in 1919 than she had been in 1913. The same national principle, added to war-weariness, which had restrained the victors from using their armies to keep the new Germany apart, had equally restrained them from using their armies to refurbish the old or create some new larger structure in Central and Southeast Europe. The very portion of the peace treaty that all Germans found most obnoxious, the revival of

Poland, protected Germany from her potentially most powerful and dangerous adversary, Russia. The various arguments over the details of the new boundaries between Hungary and Romania, between Poland and Czechoslovakia, between Bulgaria and Greece, between Austria and Yugoslavia, all only underline two facts of supreme importance: that Germany was now actually or potentially infinitely more powerful than any of her eastern and Southeastern European neighbors, and that there was practically no likelihood of those neighbors ever joining together against Germany.

The modifications introduced into the peace settlement reinforced rather than mitigated the stronger relative position of Germany. The prime example of this was the reparations question. The Germans shook off the reparations payments by simple refusal to pay, by destroying their own currency—in part to demonstrate inability to pay—and by more than off-setting what payments were made through borrowing abroad, followed by repudiation of most of these loans in the 1930s.^a

This process and the international public discussion of it fed an illusion of fateful significance. Because Germany did not pay reparations, it came to be widely believed that no or almost no reparations were paid at all. This, of course, is nonsense. All the reparations were paid: the devastated towns were rebuilt, the orchards replanted, the mines pumped out and all the pensions to survivors were paid (with some still being paid). The bill was simply shifted to other shoulders, primarily the very countries that had seen their economies suffer most from the war. This shifting of the burden of repair costs from the less damaged German economy to the more damaged economies of others thus served to redouble rather than off-set the impact of the war itself. Only when a realistic perspective is restored to an examination of the peace settlement, its nature, its impact, and its modifications, can one begin to understand how a period of supposed German enfeeblement could culminate within less than two decades in a Europe, even a world, again terrified of German might.

The governments and peoples of the post-war era were not only pre-occupied with the real and imagined defects of the peace settlement but also by what they thought were the lessons of the war. There was a great deal of discussion and concern about the causes of the Great War, primarily because it was seen as a horrendous disaster whose causes and origins ought to be examined from the perspective of avoiding any repetition. If military leaders are often castigated for preparing to fight

^a Recent work on reparations by such scholars as Sally Marks, Stephen Schuker, and Mark Trachtenberg has begun to displace the traditional picture.

the last war, civilians can be castigated with equal justice for trying to avoid it. In both cases, there is a measure of value in circumspectly drawn lessons of limited application, but the conceptualization is inherently faulty even if understandable. One can no more avoid a war one has already been in than one can refight a conflict that is over; but as the recurrent discussion in the United States of not getting into another Vietnam should remind one, these obvious truths rarely prevent anyone from trying.

Certainly American policy in the post-1919 years came to be dominated by beliefs about how the United States had become involved in the war and might accordingly take steps to avoid a repetition. Americans tend to express their beliefs in their laws. The various neutrality laws were deliberately designed to preclude any repeat performance of what many thought a mistaken entrance into an unnecessary war; and it is possible that if enacted in the first rather than the fourth decade of this century, they would indeed have had that effect. By the 1930s, however, the decision of 1917 was beyond recall. It could in fact be argued that, combined with a voluntary reduction of the American army to about the level imposed on Germany by the peace treaty, the measures taken to keep the United States out of war merely encouraged Adolf Hitler and thus helped precipitate another war. In any case, the view that America had made a mistake in allowing itself to become embroiled in what came to be perceived as a quarrel not of vital interest to this country largely determined American policy. And that view certainly precluded any American commitment to uphold that war's outcome.

The new leaders of the Soviet Union had not waited until the armistice of November 1918 to decide that the war was not for them. They had withdrawn in March. Though rescued by the victory of the Western Powers over Germany from the most onerous provisions the Germans had imposed on them in the peace treaty they had signed that month, the Bolshevik leaders never abandoned the view that they had been wise to pull out of the war on whatever terms they could obtain. The whole conflict had been an inherent and necessary concomitant of a capitalistic world, of which they neither had nor wanted any part. By definition, such horrors would continue to be an inherent and necessary concomitant of any capitalist world that survived, a view which suggested the desirability of neutrality in any repetition whenever and wherever it might come. Given the weakness of the new regime, caution was clearly indicated lest the capitalist powers join together to attack the Soviet Union rather than fighting each other. The essentially defensive posture of the Soviet Union was obscured by the world-wide antics of the Comintern, the international organization of Communist Parties which had agreed to

subservience to Moscow; but as the largely self-created Russian war scare of 1926–27 could have led one to predict, the appearance of real dangers in East Asia from 1931 and in Europe from 1933 produced the most cautious responses from the Soviet Union: a combination of concessions to potential attackers with encouragement for others to fight them.

If the great powers on the periphery of Europe moved toward isolation and neutrality on the basis of their view of the war, what about the European powers themselves? The Italians alone had been divided over the prospect of entering the conflict; its costs destroyed their economic, social, and political system. If the new regime Benito Mussolini installed in 1922 on the ruins of the old glorified war as a sign of vitality and repudiated pacifism as a form of decay, the lesson drawn from the terrible battles against Austria on the Isonzo river—in which the Italians fought far better than popular imagination often allows—was that the tremendous material and technical preparations needed for modern war were simply beyond the contemporary capacity of the country.⁴ This was almost certainly a correct perception, but, given the ideology of Fascism with its emphasis on the moral benefits of war, it did not lead to the conclusion that an Italy without a big stick had best speak very, very softly. On the contrary, the new regime drew the opposite conclusion.⁴ Noisy eloquence and rabid journalism might be substituted for serious preparations for war, a procedure that was harmless enough if no one took any of it seriously, but a certain road to disaster once some outside and Mussolini inside the country came to believe that the “eight million bayonets” of the Duce’s imagination actually existed.

France had borne the greatest burden of the war, including the highest proportion of both casualties and destruction. Triumphant only in association with powerful allies, terrified of her own isolated weakness, France looked apprehensively rather than confidently upon the post-war world. For her leaders the war had only reinforced the twin conclusions drawn from the war of 1870–71: France needed allies, and a war with Germany was likely to be fought out on French soil. The lessons drawn from these conclusions were, however, contradictory. If France needed allies and if these allies were to be of any help against Germany, then the French would have to be willing to come actively to the aid of those allies if they in turn were threatened. On the other hand, if another war on French soil were to be avoided, then an even more elaborate system of border defenses than that of the pre-1914 period would be needed,

⁴ This generalization does not preclude either technical advances in design and engineering of advanced weapons or planning for mechanized warfare in abstract terms; what was absent was the capacity to translate either into the massive actual forces required by modern war.

with victory coming as it had in 1914–18 by again halting any German attacks, only this time at the border rather than in the middle of France's richest provinces.

That this strategy promised catastrophe for any continental allies of France was so obvious that it was for years ignored outside France as much as in Paris. Even those like the Socialist leader Léon Blum, who objected to military alliances in the belief that the existence of such alliances had contributed to the outbreak of the last war, never suggested any alternative national strategy. The spectacle of a France essentially without a coherent policy can be understood only with reference to the weakness of what had once been Europe's leading power and to the mental debility of a military leadership, which apparently hoped to off-set its 30 percent underestimation of German front-line strength in 1914 by a 300 percent over-estimate of German front-line strength in the 1930s.⁵

As for French diplomacy in the immediate post-war years, it fastened on the hope of rescuing what could be rescued from the shambles made by the United States and Britain of the peace settlement by their refusal to honor the bargain made with France over the Rhineland, when they had promised a defensive alliance to dissuade France from detaching the Rhineland permanently from Germany. Here too domestic developments, in this case of a fiscal and social nature,⁶ prevented adherence to a coherent and determined foreign policy, so that Paris reaped all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of firmness toward Germany. Facing the memory of the Great War, perhaps it would be better to say paralyzed by that memory, France resigned herself to an era of drift and despair.

In Britain there were also two lessons drawn from the war, one from its origins and one from its conduct. The lesson of its origins was believed to be that a quarrel in an obscure corner of Europe—obscure needless to say only from the perspective of London—had led to a general catastrophe. This was taken to mean that if any problem anywhere in Europe were not solved peacefully, even if at some sacrifice to those involved, it could lead to a war that was most likely to become once again a general war, drawing in England as well as most other nations. If the lesson of 1914 was that war in Europe could not be localized, then local wars obviously had to be kept from starting in the first place; and from this view came the concept of peaceful change as a means of resolving local issues likely to precipitate local wars that would in any case become general once again.

The other lesson drawn from the conduct of war was that England's unprecedented creation of a huge continental army, however necessary at

the time, must under no circumstances become a precedent for the future. Even those who claimed that Field Marshal Haig had started with a strategic concept in his great campaign of 1917—and there were and are those who dispute that contention—generally agreed that the British could, should, and would never again go to Passchendaele, the scene of slaughter that symbolized the bloody horror of the trenches. Great Britain, like the United States, would dismantle her armed forces, and in particular reduce her army also to about the size specified for Germany by the peace treaty. Distaste for the past constricted any realistic concept of the future. If war ever came again, Britain would return to her earlier pattern of subsidizing continental allies and providing substantial but limited land forces, while relying on blockade pressure and the strategic possibilities afforded by sea power to throttle any continental enemy.

If Austria–Hungary had dissolved under the impact of war and defeat, Germany had been and continued to be held together by nationalistic sentiments and the exertions of those political parties and leaders who in pre-war Germany had been denounced as the alleged enemies of the state. Within the country, discussion of the war and its lessons was heavily concentrated on the supposed failure to implement the “Schlieffen Plan” for victory fully as a cause of German defeat in the first Battle of the Marne in 1914, and on the imaginary stab-in-the-back by the home front as the cause of defeat in 1918. Although an excellent case can be made that Count Alfred von Schlieffen should have been committed to a mental institution for his plan to employ non-existent army units, whose creation he opposed, rather than celebrated as a military genius; and an even better case can be made for the position that Germany’s home front was the most solid and the least disaffected of any European great power during the war, all the speculations of a contrary nature made in Germany were of purely theoretical significance for foreign policy at that time since only a flood of harmless, even if utterly misleading, books and articles resulted from them during the 1920s. Policy was determined in that decade by men who recognized that Germany could not risk another general war, and that only a localized war that was absolutely certain to remain localized could ever be contemplated; and this qualification meant that in practice Germany could not go to war under any then foreseeable circumstances.

All this would change when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 because his deductions from the war differed in important respects from those of others. War had been an intended and even a preferred part of National Socialist policy from the beginning, not so much out of a preference for fighting for its own sake, but from the entirely accurate conviction that the aim of German expansion could be secured only by war.

Germany was to seize the agricultural land needed to feed its population, a population that would grow further as it obtained such land, and which would accordingly expand its needs and its lands into the indefinite future. This crude Social Darwinism, in which racial groups fought for land which could provide the means of subsistence, expelling or exterminating but never assimilating other groups, was derived from a view of history as deterministic as that of Marx, but substituting race for class as the key to understanding.⁷ Its application had internal as well as external implications.

The Jews were seen as the most immediate threat to racial purity inside Germany, and as the main motor of resistance outside the country. A policy of extreme anti-Semitism would accordingly be a central concern of the government in peace first and in war later. Furthermore, a key internal need was the urgency of increasing the birthrate of the allegedly better and reducing the birthrate of the supposedly inferior racial stocks within the German population, measures that required a dictatorial regime, which alone could in addition prepare for, and hope to succeed in, the wars a racial policy called for in external affairs. Measured by the criterion of feeding a growing German population with the products of its own agricultural land, the boundaries Germany had once had were almost as useless as those of the 1920s; and thus a revision of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919 could be only a propaganda excuse and never a goal of German policy. The vast reaches of additional land to be obtained would never be granted peacefully, and war was therefore both necessary and inevitable.

The bulk of the land to be conquered was in Russia, which, by what Hitler considered a stroke of particularly good fortune for Germany, had been taken over by what he believed to be a group of Jewish Bolsheviks who were incapable of organizing the—in any case inferior—largely Slavic population for effective resistance. The real obstacles to German expansion lay elsewhere. Germany was in the middle of Europe and would have to establish a completely secure position there before heading East. France was the closest main enemy and Czechoslovakia the closest minor one. The sequence of wars would therefore be Czechoslovakia first, France second, then the drive East, and thereafter elsewhere. In the decade 1924–34 Hitler had thought that a war with England could be postponed until after the one with Russia, but events early in his rule disabused him of this illusion; and by 1935 he was convinced of the opposite and making preparations accordingly.

But belief in the necessity for a series of new wars immediately raised the memory of the last, and it is in this regard that Hitler's deductions from that conflict become significant. If the last war had started with an

unforeseen incident in the Balkans, and in what he considered the wrong year at that, his wars would start at times of his choosing and accordingly with incidents of his creation.⁴ If the last war had spread from a corner of Europe to the whole globe, drowning Germany in a flood of enemies, Germany would so arrange the circumstances of its wars that they could be fought in isolation, one at a time, against enemies of its choice and with victory in each facilitating victory in the next. If it had been the long drawn out enfeeblement of Germany under the impact of blockade on the home front and a stalemated battle of attrition in the trenches that had brought on collapse at home and then defeat at the front, the alternative was to establish a firm dictatorship at home where privations would be kept to a minimum, and to fight the wars in such a fashion as to preclude stalemate and obviate the impact of any blockade. Such procedures would enable Germany to eat the European and eventually the world artichoke from the inside, leaf by leaf, strengthened by each meal for the next, until world peace would be attained, when, to quote his views as one of his associates, Rudolf Hess, summarized them in 1927: "one power, the racially best one, has attained complete and uncontested supremacy."⁸

The early stages of Hitler's program would be enormously facilitated by the great gap between the realities of power produced by the peace settlement and the widespread illusions which have been described. Many thought that Germany's grievances should perhaps be met by concessions, but in any case there was little immediate recognition of danger. The very idea that anyone could even think of starting another European war after the experience of 1914-18 was inconceivable to most, and Hitler shrewdly recognized the reluctance of others to interfere with his moves. He would take the first steps under the pretense of satisfying German grievances and thereby strengthen both his international and his domestic position.

The domestic consolidation of power with a dictatorship based on a one-party state as in the Soviet Union and Italy—which Hitler had held up as models for Germany before 1933⁹—proceeded with great rapidity in 1933 and 1934.¹⁰ The establishment of political and cultural controls was essentially completed in those first years, though their effectiveness would increase with time; while the economic controls were imposed

⁴ It is indicative of the extent to which memory of World War I dominated Hitler's thinking about plans for the future that at one stage his plans for the annexation of Austria included a German-arranged assassination of either the German ambassador or the military attaché in that country, and that similarly, the German-arranged assassination of the German Minister to Czechoslovakia was thought of as an appropriate pretext for the attack on Czechoslovakia—both concepts obviously inspired by the role of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand in precipitating World War I. In both instances other projects replaced these first thoughts.

more slowly, primarily in the years 1934–36. Both processes were assisted by the political, economic, and social effects of massive government spending, which greatly speeded up the economic recovery that had begun before the National Socialists came to power. Included in the spending program was a major buildup of the armed forces, which took many off the unemployment roll directly by putting them in uniforms and others by employing them both in the armaments factories and in construction projects for headquarters, army bases, air force landing fields, and naval shipyards. A huge rearmament program had always been intended by the National Socialists; now it seemed to provide temporary economic and hence domestic political advantages as well. Coming at a time when other countries were more inclined to reduce their military expenditures under the impact of the depression and the pressure of pacifist sentiments, the German armament program would change the balance of currently available military power rather quickly.

Germany disregarded, first in secret and then in the open, those restrictions imposed on her by the peace settlement. Before 1933 there had been relatively minor violations, some of the more significant being assisted by the Soviet Union, where German officers could keep up with developments in air, armored, and chemical warfare in exchange for training Red Army officers. Now the new government's big rearmament drive, creation of a large air force, reintroduction of conscription, and initiation of a huge naval building program, broke all prior dimensions and restraints. These steps were, to judge by all available evidence, enormously popular in Germany; whether the reaction they necessarily evoked abroad makes them the "successes" which they are still frequently called is a question not often examined with sufficient care.

In any case, the world was left in little doubt that a new Germany would adopt new policies. Germany left the League of Nations, repudiated all controls on her army and air force, and planned from the beginning to disregard the limitations on her navy which she nominally accepted in a 1935 agreement with England. In 1936 Hitler took advantage of Italy's breach with the Western Powers over the invasion of Ethiopia to break the provisions of both the Peace Treaty and the Locarno Treaty of 1925, which called for the demilitarization of the Rhineland in exchange for guarantees against a repetition of the French 1923 occupation of the key Ruhr industrial region. An attempt in 1934 to overthrow the Austrian government had failed;¹¹ but the German rapprochement with Italy, reinforced by joint intervention on the Nationalist side in the Spanish civil war, opened up the possibility of a takeover of Austria, combining pressure from the inside with military threats from the outside.

In the world of the 1930s it was by no means easy to decide what to do in the face of the German menace. The international institution created in the peace settlement, the League of Nations, had been crippled at birth by the absence of the United States and the exclusion of Russia as well as the defeated powers. When confronted by its first serious test in Japan's 1931 seizure of Manchuria, it failed over a problem inherent in the concept of collective security, recurring monotonously in the 1930s, and of continuing difficulty today. In a world of separate states, the theory of averting the danger of war by the threat of universal or at least large-scale collective action requires for its implementation that in practice countries be willing to go to war if necessary over specific issues that might be, or at least appear to be, of only marginal significance to them. Not only does this require all involved to maintain substantial forces at all times, but it also makes every little war into a very big one. No power was prepared to do so over Manchuria.¹² Hitler's strategy of fighting a series of isolated wars would confront the powers with the same dilemma: the responsibility for converting his carefully delimited conflicts into a world war would be left to others — others who were peacefully inclined and who had begun their rearmament after and in response to Germany's.

Under these circumstances the United States and the Soviet Union held to their isolationist stance. Insofar as they modified these positions, it tended to be in opposite directions. The American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, increasingly thought that the Western Powers should be strengthened so that they could resist Germany and thus hopefully avert war from the United States. The most tangible expression of this approach had been an effort to assist in the building up of the French air force, that is, to help out in an area where the Western Powers were clearly especially weak and in which the use of American industrial capacity could benefit defence capabilities on both sides of the Atlantic.¹³ By 1939 Roosevelt's policy culminated in attempts to revise the neutrality laws so that the United States could at least sell weapons to countries resisting Hitler, and in urging the Soviet Union to align herself with the Western Powers lest a Germany triumphant in Western Europe reach out to dominate the globe.¹⁴ If the first of these policies foundered on Congressional opposition, the second reached the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin when he had already decided that the way for the Soviet Union to avoid war was neither to join the anti-Hitler coalition nor remain neutral, but rather to nudge Hitler into war against others by promising to assist him.

The fact that Soviet archives for those years are only now beginning

to be opened a little, necessarily makes discussion of Soviet policy somewhat speculative. There are, however, some things which are known from materials published by the Soviet Union itself, from the archives of other nations, and from the open record of Soviet actions. It is known from Soviet and other publications that through espionage agents and other intelligence sources Moscow knew that Germany had refused to ally herself with Japan against Russia (as Tokyo wanted), and that Tokyo in turn had declined German efforts to secure an alliance with Japan against the Western Powers. Similarly, the Soviet government was informed of the German plan to secure either the subservience or the defeat of Poland.¹⁵ Finally, the fact that the Soviet Union had a spy in the code section of the British Foreign Office until his arrest in September 1939 suggests that, either by direct access to British documents or the reading of British codes, Moscow was fully informed on British policy.¹⁶

Under these circumstances, the knowledge that Germany intended to attack Poland—and thereafter the Western Powers—and was looking for allies in these ventures, while Britain and France could either fight Germany alongside Poland or after Poland was conquered, reopened for Stalin the possibility of an agreement with Hitler, something he had repeatedly but unsuccessfully attempted to obtain in prior years.¹⁷ Now Hitler might be interested, and his interest could be stimulated if public negotiations by the Soviet Union with Britain and France ran parallel to secret talks with the Germans. As Stalin would himself explain his view in July 1940: “the U.S.S.R. had wanted to change the old equilibrium . . . but that England and France had wanted to preserve it. Germany had also wanted to make a change in the equilibrium, and this common desire to get rid of the old equilibrium had created the basis for the rapprochement with Germany.”¹⁸

By steadily raising their demands on the British and French as earlier Soviet demands were met, the Soviets could use negotiations with the Western Powers to insure that Germany would pay a high price for Soviet cooperation, a project realized in the secret agreements between Germany and the Soviet Union of August 23, 1939, which partitioned Eastern Europe between them.¹⁹ Whether Stalin was wise to encourage and subsequently assist Germany, or whether the British, French, and American perception, that Germany could be held back from war or alternatively defeated in war only by a great coalition, was the sounder view, would be determined by events.^a

^a Sometimes the secret British–German contacts of 1939 are cited as a parallel to the German–Soviet negotiations. When compared, they reveal a fundamental and characteristic difference.

The Italian government observed German moves toward war with a mixture of admiration and apprehension. Determined to expand Italy's role in the world by the acquisition of control of the Mediterranean and as much of Southeast Europe, North Africa, and the Near East as possible, Mussolini was favorably impressed by the German threat to the positions of Britain and France, the two powers most obviously blocking his path. He was at least equally impressed by the signs of military and industrial might as well as of public unity which he had seen during his own trip to Germany in September 1937.

At the same time, there were two nagging causes of apprehension. There was always the possibility that Germany might move before Italy was ready, a concern which affected Italy's last-minute maneuvers in the crises of both 1938 and 1939. Unprepared to cope with any serious offensive against Italy by Britain and France, her leaders were all too aware of another lesson of World War I: what had happened to Germany's Austrian ally in 1914 when German concentration on the Western Front had exposed an unassisted Austria to disaster on the Eastern Front.

A second apprehension took the form of rivalry between the two. Would Germany secure gains out of all proportion to those falling to Italy? In 1939 the timing of Italy's decision to end the independence of Albania in April was undoubtedly influenced by Germany's seizure of most of what was left of Czechoslovakia in March. This pattern would subsequently be repeated.

The recognition by Mussolini in 1939 that a long and major war would certainly develop out of a German attack on Poland led him to listen to those of his advisors, especially his son-in-law and Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, who argued that Italy was not ready for war and had no obligation to join Germany. Later events would bring a shift in these assessments.

Mussolini's pride, however, left him reluctant to temper public and private expressions of sympathy for Germany by cautions appropriate to Italy's unreadiness for war. This reluctance was reinforced by the desire to prevent the recurrence of German reproaches about Italy's alleged unreliability as an ally stemming from Rome's joining the Allies in World

The British specified that any Anglo-German agreement was possible only if Germany first demonstrated her good faith by taking a step back from her breach of the Munich agreement, that is, by freeing Czechoslovakia, and second, if she refrained from attacking Poland. The Soviets, on the other hand, specified that agreement would come if Germany agreed for the Soviet Union to secure large parts of Poland, all of Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, as well as a large part of Romania. The Soviet Union alone outside the Axis accepted the disappearance of Czechoslovakia and anticipated the disappearance of other countries; the British hoped to reverse the whole process of making independent countries disappear.

War I, rather than maintaining her pre-war alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Italian unwillingness to reveal to Berlin that the verbal cheering from Rome would not be translated into military participation in war on Germany's side would have the effect of surprising Hitler when he sounded the trumpet for battle—only to discover that Mussolini anticipated some years of peacetime concerts.

The first time this happened had been in 1938 when, at the last-minute, Mussolini's urging of a peaceful settlement on Hitler had been a major factor in the latter's last-minute reversal of a choice for war.²⁰ That Italian reversal—as it seemed to Hitler—would make Hitler change his approach to the initiation of war as well as his reaction to a repetition of Italy's last-minute reservations. The way for the 1938 reversal had been prepared by British policy, and Italian reluctance in 1939 would also be greatly influenced by Rome's understanding of British determination.

The British, threatened like Russia in both East Asia and Europe, concentrated their attention, like the Russians and later the Americans, on what was perceived as the more dangerous threat in Europe. While beginning to rearm, their belief that a war anywhere would eventually involve them led the London government to try for local peaceful solutions of specific issues or, as an alternative procedure capable of simultaneous implementation, to secure a general settlement with Germany in which economic and colonial concessions would be exchanged for German acceptance of the essentials of the status quo in Central and Eastern Europe. Hitler invariably rejected out of hand all British efforts at a general settlement, in fact he would never allow them to become the subject of serious discussion, precisely because it was the status quo that he intended to destroy.²¹ As for the British alternative hope of securing the peaceful resolution of specific issues, this would be realized only once, to Hitler's great disgust and everlasting regret.

In 1938 Hitler thought that he had with great care laid the groundwork for the first of his wars. Czechoslovakia would be destroyed in a war started over an incident ordered from Berlin, with the victim isolated politically by propaganda about the alleged grievances of the Sudeten Germans living in that country, isolated militarily by the deterrent effect on France of Germany's western fortifications, and isolated diplomatically through the active participation of Hungary and Poland and the passive participation of Italy and Japan on Germany's side. Once tricked into negotiations by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Hitler tried desperately to extricate himself; but then at the last moment funked at war when confronted by the doubts of his own people and advisors,

the warning of war with England and France, the reluctance of Mussolini, and the hesitation of Hungary. Reluctantly he settled for his ostensible aims rather than his real ambition; that is to say, he took the portions of Czechoslovakia adjacent to Germany and inhabited predominantly by Germans, but he refrained from the war to destroy Czechoslovakia and seize most of the country as he had originally intended.

While others thought of the Munich agreement of 1938 as a sign of German triumph and as a symbol of weak-kneed acquiescence in aggression, Hitler looked on it as a terrible disappointment then and as the greatest error of his career later.²² He had been cheated of war and, after destroying what was left of Czechoslovakia anyway, he would move toward war in a manner calculated to preclude what he considered the disappointing outcome of 1938.

The war for which in the winter of 1938–39 Hitler prepared Germany and sought appropriate relationships with other powers was one against Britain and France. They had threatened him in 1938, and they would in any case have to be defeated before Germany could safely turn to that conquest of the Soviet Union which would provide her with vast space for the settlement of her people. The preparations for this war were internal as well as external.²³ Internally, the government began a major effort to remedy what seemed to be a reluctance of the population at the prospect of war itself, a reluctance all too obvious in 1938. Hitler attributed this in part to his own regime's propaganda stress on the peaceful objectives of German policy, a propaganda designed to lull fears at home and abroad in the early years of National Socialist rule but now in need of reversal lest it undermine the resolution of the German public. The main organs of mass communications would have to be orchestrated to arouse war fever in the country.²⁴

In addition, the anticipated war with the Western Powers required a substantial acceleration of the German armaments program. Since it was increasingly obvious that France was most reluctant to fight at all and that the backbone of Western resistance to Germany would come from Great Britain, it would be those portions of the German military machine most specifically needed for use against the latter country that would be given added emphasis at this time. In this framework of priorities, it will be easier to understand why it was precisely at this time that special orders were given for a great buildup of the German air force, with particular emphasis on the new two-engined dive bomber, the Junker-88, designed with England in mind.²⁵ Similarly, in January 1939 the highest priority in the allocations of scarce raw materials and labor was assigned to the naval construction program.

Whether or not either these internal preparations or the external ones

still to be discussed could be completed quickly, Hitler already thought of himself under great time pressure. Both material and personal considerations made him think of war not only as an essential tool for the conquests he intended, but as preferable sooner rather than later. The material consideration was simple. Once Germany had by her rapid rearmament gained a headstart over her neighbors, the sooner she struck, the greater the chances for success. The longer war was postponed, the more likely it would be that rearmament programs inaugurated by others in response to the menace from Germany could catch up with and surpass that of the Third Reich. Lacking within her original borders the economic resources for the repeated replacement of one set of weapons by more modern ones, Germany could either strike while she still had an advantage over others or see the balance of strength shift in favor of her potential adversaries. The very advantage of Germany's headstart would become a disadvantage as other powers brought into production on their greater economic bases more recently developed and more numerous weapons. Germany would therefore have to strike before such a situation developed, a point which Hitler had repeatedly explained to his associates, and which indeed represents an essentially accurate assessment of the situation if Germany were to have even the slightest hope of succeeding in even a portion of the preposterously ambitious schemes of conquest Hitler intended.

The personal element was Hitler's fear of an early death for himself or, alternatively, the preference for leading Germany into war while he was still vigorous rather than aging. Identifying Germany's fate and future with his personal life and his role in its history, Hitler preferred to lead the country into war himself, lest his successors lack the will to do so. He also thought of his age as a factor of importance; it is impossible to ignore his repeated extraordinary assertions in 1938 that he preferred to go to war at the age of forty-nine and in 1939 that he would rather lead his nation at the age of fifty than go to war when fifty-five or sixty years old.²⁶ In this regard one enters a realm yet to be seriously and reliably explored by psychohistorians, but one can no more overlook references to his personal role and age in the final war crisis of 1939 than the fact that his earlier decision to begin his first war against Czechoslovakia in 1938 was taken in early May of that year—a few days after fear of cancer had induced him to write his last will.²⁷

Here, too, one must accept a certain tragic accuracy in Hitler's perception; whether any other German leader would indeed have taken the plunge is surely doubtful, and the very warnings Hitler received from a few of his advisors can only have reinforced his belief in his personal role as the one man able, willing, and even eager to lead Germany and

drag the world into war. Under these circumstances, what counted in 1939 was that the propaganda effort and the new program to redouble the armament effort had been launched, not the degree to which they were in reality falling short of their objectives, or required far more time for their completion than Hitler's personal clock allowed.

In foreign affairs, German preparations for the war against Britain and France moved along two parallel lines. Certain major powers were to be brought in as allies, while minor powers on Germany's eastern border were to be induced to accept a position sufficiently subservient to Germany to assure the latter of a quiet Eastern Front when the attack was launched in the West. Both lines of policy were pursued simultaneously, and in both Germany had, or appeared to have, a success and a failure.

The major powers scheduled to be Germany's allies were Italy and Japan. With their navies helping to make up for the deficiency in the naval armaments she needed for war with England and France but had not yet remedied herself, and with their strategic position threatening British and French colonies and communications in the Mediterranean, the Near East, Africa, and East Asia, the two adherents to the proposed new Triple Alliance could either assist Germany directly in war with the Western Powers or at the very least force a major diversion of strength on the latter. In lengthy negotiations, the Germans succeeded in persuading the Italians to accept an offensive and defensive alliance, signed in May of 1939; but in even lengthier negotiations the Japanese balked at the prospect.

The government in Tokyo was divided on the proper course to follow, but even those who favored an alliance with Germany wanted one directed against the Soviet Union, not one against the Western Powers. There had been fighting with the Soviets in the preceding year and there was further fighting in 1939. Not only those in the government inclined toward an aggressive policy toward Russia, but even those who favored a more restrained attitude thought that a closer alignment, with Germany and Italy directed against Russia, could help Japan either to fight the Soviet Union or to make that country more amenable in negotiated settlements of outstanding differences between Moscow and Tokyo. But almost no one among the contending factions at that time wanted to risk war with Britain and France, especially because of the real possibility that such a conflict meant war with the United States as well. In spite of strong urgings from the Germans, who were vigorously supported in this regard by the Japanese ambassadors in Berlin and Rome, the Japanese government simply would not agree to an alliance against Britain and France.

From the perspective of Berlin, the interest of Japan in an anti-Soviet instead of an anti-British and anti-French alliance was utterly silly. At a future time of her own choosing, Germany would seize what she wanted from the Soviet Union, an operation Hitler thought of as simple to carry out once he had cleared his Western Front by crushing Britain and France. It made no sense at all to drive the Russians into supporting Germany's main and immediate enemies by joining with Japan in an anti-Soviet alliance. If the Japanese did not want to join with Germany in an alliance directed against the West, that was a reflection of their short-sightedness and their unsuitability as an ally in the immediate situation. A possible substitute for Japan in Hitler's perception could in fact be provided by the Soviet Union itself. He had earlier regularly rejected Soviet suggestions for closer relations, but now that country could be helpful because it might both replace Japan in threatening Britain and in addition assist in dealing with the portion of his other foreign policy preparation for war which was not working out quite the way he had hoped.

In order to consider an attack in the West safe, Hitler wanted his eastern border buffered during that attack by the subordination of Germany's eastern neighbors to her. Czechoslovakia had been effectively subordinated; three other countries bordered Germany on the east: Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary.

It was obvious to the German government that Lithuania would do out of fear whatever Germany wanted, and at a time chosen by Berlin; that portion of Hitler's program was accordingly entirely subordinated to his assessment of appropriate tactics in regard to Poland.²⁸ Germany annexed the portion of Lithuania which Germany had lost in 1919 and did so under circumstances designed to put maximum pressure on Poland; thereafter she intended to annex all of Lithuania by agreement with the Soviet Union—only to trade most of it and later sell the rest to Moscow during the war.

The Hungarians had annoyed Hitler by refusing in 1938 to join in an attack on Czechoslovakia because they were certain that such an attack would lead to a general war, and a losing one at that. Their continued interest in sharing in any partition of Czechoslovakia and their fear of the implications for their own ambitions of better relations between Germany and Romania led to a reorientation in Hungarian policy in the winter of 1938–39. Accompanied by major personnel changes in the government, this reorientation made the Hungarian government completely dependent on Germany; the reluctant partner became, or at least became for the time being, a dependable subordinate.²⁹

The symbolic gesture of obeisance to Germany made by Hungary—but refused by Poland—was adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact. Originally devised by Joachim von Ribbentrop and Japanese military attaché General Oshima Hiroshi as a means of tying Japan to Germany, and accompanied by a whole series of self-contradicting secret agreements,³⁰ this pact had become for the Germans a sort of performance bond to be exacted as a test of distance from the Western Powers and subordination to herself. It was, of course, known in Berlin that the Hungarian, like the Polish leaders of the time, were vehemently, even violently, anti-Communist; adherence to a German-sponsored Anti-Comintern Pact could not make them any more so. It could however be recognized as a sign of willingness to take orders from Berlin—and it was so regarded at the time.

The leaders of Poland, however, saw themselves as the guardians of her regained independence. They had repeatedly, and at times by extraordinary and disturbing gestures during the 1920s and 1930s, made clear their insistence that Poland would not compromise either her independence or her right to be consulted about issues they saw as directly affecting that independence.³¹ When the Germans in the winter of 1938–39 demanded from Poland territorial and transport concessions, concessions they had earlier promised not to ask for, and also insisted that Poland adhere to the Anti-Comintern Pact, the Warsaw government was willing to consider some compromises on the first two points, but it flatly refused the ritual of obeisance.

For five months, from late October 1938 to late March 1939, the Berlin authorities hoped for and tried to obtain Polish surrender by alternating offers and threats, promises and pressure. The Warsaw government was for obvious reasons interested in a peaceful settlement by negotiations on problems in German–Polish relations, but unwilling to acquiesce in a voluntary relinquishment of the country's independent and sovereign status. As this was precisely the key point for the German government, Hitler decided, and so informed his associates, that the sequence of German steps would have to be altered. First Poland would be destroyed by war, and then Germany could safely attack in the West. If the Western Powers came in on Poland's side right away, then a wider war would come sooner rather than later; but since a war with the West would come anyway, and since an attack in the West without a prior crushing of Poland would involve leaving large German forces to guard against Poland, it was preferable to run the risk of general war now.

In the context of this revised concept for 1939, the immediate focus of military planning would be on an attack on Poland delivered in the fall of 1939, with enough time to defeat that country before the autumn

rains softened the generally unpaved roads and runways. Lithuania and the newly created puppet state of Slovakia would be invited to join in the attack on Poland from the north and the south; and, if they were agreeable, they would be rewarded with suitable pieces of the conquered state. Italy would be invited to join; and if Japan turned out to be too cautious or too stupid to do likewise, then the Soviet Union was an obvious new partner.

Since Germany's attack on Poland was from Berlin's perspective the necessary preliminary to an attack on Britain and France—with the Soviet Union's turn coming later—an agreement with Moscow would isolate Poland and either discourage the British and French from joining the obviously doomed Poles or alternatively break any Allied blockade of Germany even before it could be imposed. Under these circumstances Berlin welcomed and reciprocated hints of agreement from Moscow and developed an economic and political agreement with the Soviet Union while moving towards a war against Poland.

This would be the lovely little war of which Hitler felt he had been cheated in 1938. Propaganda about the poor persecuted Germans in Poland would consolidate opinion in Germany and isolate Poland from Britain and France the way similar propaganda—sometimes using identical stories—had been utilized in 1938. Germany's allies and supporters in other countries would either deter the Western Powers from aiding Poland or assist in the conflict.

If in these respects the pattern of 1938 was to be repeated, in others it was deliberately changed. In 1938 Germany had been involved in negotiations practically the whole year and at the last moment had not been able to break out of them into hostilities. This time there would be no negotiations with Poland after the Poles had declined German demands for subservience on March 26.³² As the Germans stepped up their propaganda campaign, they prepared with meticulous care the incidents which would be staged to justify the attack on Poland. Unlike 1938 when this project had been entrusted first to the German army and later to recruits from the German minority in Czechoslovakia, this time the show would be arranged by the German security service itself and staged on German soil, not inside the country to be attacked. To avoid the risk of becoming entangled in last-minute diplomatic negotiations, the German ambassadors in London and Warsaw were recalled from their posts and not allowed to return to them in the final critical weeks. Demands on Poland designed to influence public opinion inside Germany for war and outside Germany against it were formulated, but Hitler would take no chance on these demands being either accepted or made the basis of new negotiations. He personally instructed his

Foreign Minister not to let them out of his hands; the demands were to be produced after war had started as a justification to the German public at home and any gullible souls abroad for the German attack. As Hitler explained to his generals on August 22, his only worry was that at the last minute some S.O.B.—the German term used was *Schweinehund*—would come along and try to deprive him of war by compromise.³³

When Hitler provided the leaders of Germany's armed forces with this insight into his evaluation of what had gone wrong in 1938 and what he therefore intended to avoid in 1939, he knew that there would be an agreement with the Soviet Union. Such an agreement would divide Eastern Europe between the Third Reich and Russia, and would either discourage the Western Powers from intervening in support of an isolated Poland, or dramatically weaken all their hopes of blockading Germany and of obliging her to disperse her armed forces among several fronts if they went to war all the same. He could count on the reassuring effect this situation would have on his generals, and he could also count on their vehement anti-Polish attitudes to produce a considerable degree of enthusiasm for a war against Poland.^a

There were, as we now know, a few skeptics in the German armed forces intelligence service, but all they could do was to leak an account of Hitler's comments to the British.³⁴ The vast majority of Germany's military leaders were either enthusiastic or acquiescent. In the first days of World War I, there had been a sense of national unity in Germany transcending all divisions of class, party, and religion; something the Germans called a *Burgfrieden*, a peace inside a castle under siege. This time, in the last moments before the launching of World War II, all that the regime needed was such a *Burgfrieden* among the holders of military authority; they were the only ones who could conceivably threaten the government and its policy. With war to be waged against Poland, and with what looked like a successful avoidance of the dreaded two-front war, the military were for the most part prepared to follow Hitler into the abyss. To Hitler it all looked much better than 1938; to most of his generals, it also looked better than 1914.

Almost as soon as the German Foreign Minister began talking with Stalin on August 23, it became obvious to Hitler that agreement with the Soviet Union would certainly be attained. Partitioning Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union presented no difficulties. In the area of the Baltic States, von Ribbentrop had been instructed to suggest the river Dvina as a new border between the two partners, an arrangement

^a Hitler's temporary rapprochement with Poland had certainly not been popular in German government circles where an anti-Polish line was always preferred—and with great fervor.

which would have left Estonia to the Soviet Union and Lithuania to Germany, while dividing Latvia between them. Stalin wanted all of Latvia; and von Ribbentrop, who had received instructions from Hitler to make extensive concessions in the negotiations, was inclined to agree. His telegram from Moscow asking for Hitler's approval on this point—an approval that was promptly given—showed Hitler that a treaty with the Soviet Union was assured. Without waiting for the final signing, to say nothing of von Ribbentrop's personal report, Hitler on August 23 ordered war to begin with the attack on Poland on August 26.

As the German military machine moved into position for the invasion of Poland, and while the civilian agencies of the German government made their last moves to be ready for the other steps timed to coincide with the beginning of hostilities, Hitler planned his final diplomatic moves. He met with Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on the latter's return from Moscow on the 24th and together the two appear to have worked out in detail the steps to be taken that day and the next, the last hours before war.³⁵ Mussolini was informed of what was coming by a telephone call to Ciano in the night of August 24–25, and a detailed letter was delivered to him on the 25th. The favorable situation created by the Nazi–Soviet Pact was described and the imminence of hostilities to crush Poland was announced—but with no reference to the fact that war had already been ordered for the next day. Hitler called on Italy to fulfill her obligations under the terms of the alliance, the “Pact of Steel” signed in May, and he apparently assumed that, under what looked like most favorable circumstances for the Axis, Mussolini would surely join in promptly.^a

Japan certainly could not be expected to come in on Germany's side; on the contrary, the government in Tokyo—which imagined itself to be involved in negotiations with Germany for an alliance *against* the Soviet Union—toppled under the political shock of the Nazi–Soviet Pact even as it ordered a protest in Berlin against what looked to Tokyo like an outrageous violation of the Japanese–German Anti-Comintern Pact.

While Japan, still engaged in actual hostilities with Russia at the time, was not expected by Berlin to be of assistance in ending the German–Polish dispute in a manner suitable to Germany, the Soviet Union naturally was. On August 25, therefore, Germany urgently asked for the appointment of a new Soviet ambassador to Berlin and the prompt

^a It must be recalled that one important factor that had restrained Italy in 1938 was no longer present. In the preceding year, the still continuing Spanish civil war opened up the possibility that a general war in Europe would lead to French and British intervention in Spain with dire effects for the substantial Italian contingent fighting with the Nationalists. The victory of Franco's nationalists in the spring of 1939 had ended this assignment; from the perspective of Rome, there was no longer an expeditionary force hostage to the situation in Spain.

dispatch of a Soviet military representative to help coordinate the forthcoming campaigns against Poland. The newly formed and loudly trumpeted association of the Soviet Union with Germany was seen as a means of forestalling Western intervention on behalf of Poland, and Berlin was accordingly interested in publicly visible signs of the new alignment.

Simultaneously with the notification to Italy and the invitation to Moscow, the German diplomatic staging actions of August 25 included special messages to the smaller countries of Western Europe: Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. All were to be promised German respect for their neutrality and threatened with war and destruction if any of them failed to protect Germany's rear by abandoning neutrality in favor of the Western Powers. The German government, as will be shown, intended to end the existence of all four countries, but at the moment when Germany was about to attack the first of the many nations it had promised to leave in peace, more promises were cheap and might be useful.

On the same day special efforts were also made to discourage Britain and France from siding with Poland; Hitler still hoped that the war with the Western Powers could be started at a time of his own selection after Poland had been crushed. If during the time needed for the Polish campaign London and Paris could be preoccupied with the hope of new agreements, the possibility of any danger to Germany in the West could be obviated until she was ready to strike herself. On the day before war was to begin, therefore, Hitler sent new messages to London and Paris, anticipating that these would be received and discussed by the governments there on the following morning—at the same time as they learned of the German invasion of Poland a few hours earlier.

On the entirely correct assumption that the French would not move without the certainty of British support, the more elaborate German message was sent to London. Pointing out to the British government that his new treaty with Russia meant both that there would be no real Eastern Front since "Russia and Germany would never again take up arms against each other," and that there would be no possibility of an effective blockade of a Germany that could now draw on the raw materials of the Soviet Union, Hitler promised that, after the German-Polish dispute had been settled, he would send an alliance offer to London. Instead of war with Germany under circumstances far less favorable to the Western Powers than in 1914, he offered the prospect of Germany's defending the British empire against any enemy, a promise of no territorial demands in the West, moderation in colonial demands, and an agreement on the limitation of armaments. Just as in March 1936 the breach of the Locarno Treaty of 1925, the only defensive alliance

Germany ever had with England, had been accompanied by a vast array of German promises and offers which could be debated while German troops marched West to remilitarize and refortify the Rhineland—and all of which were broken or withdrawn once they had served this purpose—so now a lengthy list of tempting bait was to be dangled before British eyes as German troops marched eastwards into Poland. Between the dispatch of this offer and the arrangement for the message to Paris, Hitler gave the final go-ahead for the attack on Poland at 4:30 a.m. the following morning, August 26.

Hoping to discourage the French from honoring their alliance with Poland, Hitler next saw the French ambassador to Germany and asked him to inform Edouard Daladier, the Prime Minister of France, that Germany did not want war with France and had no claims on her, but that the situation in German-Polish relations was intolerable. If France wanted a war with Germany that would be unfortunate, but it would be their choice. With the Soviet Union already aligned on Germany's side, with Britain, as Hitler hoped, deflected by his offer, the French Cabinet would have his kind words in front of it as its members debated what to do the following morning. The strong pacifist sentiments known to exist in France might well keep the French from going to war while Germany secured its Eastern Front for the turn against the West. All seemed ready for war as German troops moved toward the border, ration books were ready for issue to the civilian population, and the concentration camp inmates who were to be murdered wearing Polish uniforms were prepared for the staged incidents that would prove to Germany and the world that it was the Poles who had begun hostilities.

Two developments which became known in Berlin in the afternoon of August 25 caused Hitler to consider a minor alteration in the stage management of Germany's initiation of hostilities. These two developments shed considerable light on the policies of other powers, while Hitler's response to these underlines his continued overwhelming preference for war as opposed to any peaceful settlement. The German government learned that Italy was not willing to join in and that Great Britain had just signed an alliance treaty with Poland. The first news item is revealing about Italian, the second about British, policy.

In Rome, the news of the forthcoming signing of a Nazi-Soviet Pact had for a very short time been seen as possibly creating a situation in which Germany could fight Poland in an isolated war. Under such happy circumstances, Italy could follow her own inclinations and German advice by attacking Yugoslavia, that country on the other side of the Adriatic which Italy had long hoped to destroy and which was now outflanked by the earlier Italian seizure of Albania. Ciano first and then

Mussolini, however, returned quickly to the firm belief that Britain and France would fight alongside Poland regardless of Soviet actions, and they tried to convince their German ally of this view. In any case, they were now confronted by a German request for an unequivocal answer.

The Italian government had the option of promising full support in what its leaders were certain would be a general war, and one in which the first blows of the Western Powers were almost certain to hit them. And they would be moving under circumstances they had not foreseen: Germany had kept its intentions secret from them until the last moment, intentions about which the Germans were not giving them the full details even now. Alternatively they could explain that they were not yet ready and could come in only after making up the deficiencies in their preparations. Mussolini followed the advice of most of those around him and reluctantly informed Hitler that Italy could not yet commit herself to entering the war. Having anticipated the full support of Mussolini, Hitler was astounded by Italy's decision, news of which reached him right after his meeting with the French ambassador and about the time he learned of the signing of the Anglo-Polish alliance.

The British government had reached its basic decision in the early weeks of 1939 when rumors of a forthcoming attack on Holland had produced a decision to fight Germany if she attacked any nation which resisted. It had subsequently turned out that the information pointing to an imminent attack in the West was incorrect, and the next German move had instead been the destruction of Czechoslovakia's independence. That country, stripped of its military defenses by the territorial concessions made to Germany in 1938 and demoralized by its abandonment by the Western Powers, had not resisted the final German onslaught; but Germany's breach of the Munich agreement showed that the alleged German concern about the fate of her minorities abroad was fakery designed to obscure the actual aim of subduing *non*-Germans.

The subsequent British policy in the face of possible German moves against Rumania and Poland, therefore, was one characterized by three consistent themes. In the first place, with the previously accepted assumption that a war started anywhere in Europe was, like that of 1914, certain to spread to the whole continent, it made little difference whether Germany first attacked in the West or in the East; Britain would be involved anyway. In view of this, it might well be wise to reverse the diplomatic strategy followed in 1938, when a firm warning to Germany had been postponed in the hope that uncertainty of British support might make for maximum concessions by Czechoslovakia, while the possibility of British intervention might persuade the Germans to accept such concessions rather than risk a general war. Now the British government

would announce its position early rather than late, hoping that firmness would deter Germany, reassure her victims, and rally others to their side. This shift in approach was in large part due to the second characteristic of London's view of the situation in 1939.

German propaganda in 1938 about the real or imagined grievances of the over three million people of German descent in Czechoslovakia had had a substantial impact on the British government, the British public, and the positions of the governments in the British Commonwealth. It was generally known in government circles in London that the Germans living in Poland might well have something to complain about—in fact that they had been treated more harshly than those in Czechoslovakia and that Poland should be urged to restrain such harsh treatment—but all this was now seen as obviously a manipulated pretext for German policies aiming at the domination of all of Europe. Only one German step could reverse that view: a restoration of independence to Czechoslovakia. And that was as permanent and clear a British pre-condition for any new agreement with Germany as it was a step that the German government was under no circumstances prepared to take.^a

The third characteristic of the British perception was that the firm public posture, which took the specific form of an announcement at the end of March 1939 that Britain would go to war alongside Poland if that country were attacked by Germany and defended herself, had to be accompanied by measures to attract other allies to Britain's side. The most obvious ally was France, herself threatened by the rising might of Germany and tied to Poland by an alliance of many years. The utter panic in Paris on September 12 and 13, 1938, when a British statement that England would fight if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia showed that the French could no longer hide behind Britain's alleged unwillingness to fight, had at that time triggered Chamberlain's first trip to Germany;³⁶ it suggested that in future crises London would be well advised to be most considerate of French concerns. It is in this context that one should see the reversal of Britain's neglect of her ground forces, and in particular the introduction of the first peacetime conscription law in the spring of 1939.³⁷ France could not be expected to fight together with England unless she could anticipate a British army fighting on the continent beside her own.

^a The restoration of Czechoslovakia, if it had come to war in 1938, like that of Poland in 1939, was always discussed in London—in terms of the World War I fate of Serbia: overrun by Germany during the fighting, it had been restored as a result of military victory by the Allies on other fronts.

Furthermore, the new posture of early firm public opposition to any new German aggression might rally other allies. It became increasingly evident that not only New Zealand but also Australia and Canada were reversing their neutralist positions of 1938; it is a revealing coincidence that on August 25, 1939, MacKenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada who had met Hitler in 1937, warned the latter that Canada would join England if it came to war.³⁸ Even the Union of South Africa was shifting toward a position more favorable to siding with England, though in the event only a change in the government there would bring a divided country into the war by a narrow margin. Even the return of port facilities vital to the protection of British commerce had made no impact on the Irish Free State's determination to remain neutral, and new issues would come to the fore there during the war; but at first London did hope that there would be support elsewhere for a firm front against further German moves.

The signing of a formal treaty between England and Poland, whose terms had been worked out in the spring of 1939, had been postponed pending an agreement between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union, it being assumed that the treaty with Poland would be subordinate to that with Russia. No one in the British government or military circles had any faith in the Soviet Union's ability to mount offensive operations into Central Europe, a view much laughed at in retrospect but perhaps not quite so inaccurate as often assumed. That the Red army in 1944-45 could move into Central Europe vast armored forces supported by an enormous array of American trucks is hardly proof that such operations were a plausible contingency in 1939. Obviously the Soviet leadership did not think so: Stalin's repeated efforts at a rapprochement with Germany suggest that his assessment of the situation was not so different from London's view, that Russia could provide supplies and support to Poland as well as defend herself against attack but was not in a position to launch offensive operations across the zone of poor communications of eastern Poland. It was precisely for such support of Poland that Britain and France hoped; and as the Soviet Union steadily raised its demand during the 1939 negotiations, the Western Powers wanted at least to restrain Moscow from siding with Germany. As has already been mentioned, these hopes were dashed; but Russia's aligning herself with Germany did not alter the fundamental perception of the London government that Germany had to be confronted, preferably with allies to disperse German strength, but if necessary without them.

The United States government had obtained accurate information on the Nazi-Soviet negotiations, primarily from a member of the German

embassy staff in Moscow. For obvious reasons, that information was kept a carefully guarded secret in Washington; but as the signing of a German–Soviet agreement looked increasingly likely—as opposed to the one between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers Roosevelt had urged on Stalin—Washington did tip off the London government. There, because of incompetence or Soviet infiltration in the Foreign Office Communications Department, the relevant telegram was not decyphered for days, so that the British government was taken by surprise when the forthcoming trip of von Ribbentrop to Moscow for the signing of a Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was announced.³⁹

The British government, however, saw in this development no fundamental change in the basic situation: Germany would be more dangerous, not less so, as a result of finding a new friend. To make certain that no one in the German or Italian government drew false conclusions about British policy from this spectacular event, messages were promptly sent to Berlin and Rome making it clear that there would be no change in the British commitment to fight alongside Poland if Germany attacked that country. It was these messages which in Rome contributed to the realization that a general as opposed to a local East European war would indeed be brought on by a German move East and hence to the Italian refusal to participate. In Berlin such messages had led Hitler to believe it worth trying to make one more attempt to detach England from Poland by the promise of an alliance offer.

It was to underline the point made in Chamberlain's letter of August 22 to Hitler that Germany should have no doubt whatever about England's willingness to go to war—with a reference to the alleged German uncertainty about British policy in 1914—that London now moved quickly to sign the alliance with Poland. Once it had become obvious that there could be no British alliance with the Soviet Union, there was no point in holding up action on the other one; and last-minute drafting changes were made as quickly as possible. This meant that the text was ready for signing on August 25, and an announcement of the signature was made public at 5:35 p.m. that day. Hitler received the news, therefore, *after* he had sent the British ambassador off to London with his new promises and *after* the final order to attack on the following morning had already been given.

The German dictator had been surprised to learn of Italy's unreadiness to participate and England's renewed expression of resolution implied in the freshly signed alliance. Hoping to try once more to separate the Western Powers from Poland, he asked his military leaders whether it was feasible to stop the military machine already set in motion or if it were already too late. He was quite willing to go to war the next

day if his advisors believed that it was no longer possible to call back the troops. They, however, told him that counter-orders could still reach all the units in time, and such orders were thereupon issued. Some incidents involving German border crossings took place, so that it was obvious to careful observers that war had been intended for the 26th, but the faked provocations involving concentration camp inmates as well as the massive invasion forces were halted in time.⁴⁰

Hitler had originally set his military advisors the target date of September 1 for the war; he had then moved the date up to August 26 because he wanted to begin as early as possible. He now explained to his naturally somewhat confused army Commander-in-Chief that the attack on Poland would take place on September 1 after all and that he might wait one more day, but that September 2 was the latest possible date;⁴¹ thereafter problems with the weather would in Hitler's view have prevented a single brief campaign against Poland. The intervening days were now available for renewed diplomatic moves to separate Britain and France from Poland, though in the end Hitler did not use all the days available by his own assessment of the situation. As soon as it became clear to him that the Western Powers would indeed intervene, he ordered the attack for the morning of September 1. Since he wanted the war to start as early as possible, he could see no point in waiting even the one day his own timetable allowed; a small but revealing indication of his order of priorities.

The agitated discussions of the last days of peace need not be reviewed here. They only confirmed the picture already obvious by August 25 — if not earlier. Italy was not prepared to join Germany, and Hitler's expression of willingness to fight England and France if they supported Poland in no way reassured Mussolini; that was precisely what he was worried about. The Polish government was no more willing to sign away its independence now than earlier, and there was no disposition in London to urge them to do so. A fairly negotiated settlement of outstanding difficulties was desired by both Warsaw and London; but the fact that the British government would not pass on to the Poles a German demand for the immediate appearance of a Polish negotiator until *after* the German deadline for his appearance had passed showed that there was no interest for capitulation in either capital. The French government was understandably shaken and disappointed about the Soviet Union's aligning herself with Germany, but the Daladier government was resigned to war; the French Foreign Minister still had hopes of a last-minute compromise, but he was by this time rather isolated in the Cabinet.

No appeals from prospective neutrals could move Hitler. He not only would not put off war for one day, he was in such a hurry that he gave the orders to begin hostilities hours earlier than the German military timetable required.⁴² To justify war in the eyes of the German public, he shared in the preparation of demands on Poland that might sound reasonable to his people—and that he ordered withheld until after they were no longer valid. He would not again run the “danger” of having his ostensible demands agreed to, or made the basis for real negotiations, or be met with counter-offers. Now that there was no longer any chance of splitting the Western Powers from Poland, his focus of attention was on the German home front in the coming war, a reflection of his belief that it had been the collapse there which had produced defeat in the preceding great conflict. When von Ribbentrop refused to give a copy of the German demands to the British Ambassador at midnight of August 30–31, the two almost came to blows. Ambassador Henderson, who had long advocated concessions to Germany, recognized that here was a deliberately conceived alibi the German government had prepared for a war it was determined to start. No wonder Henderson was angry; von Ribbentrop on the other hand could see war ahead and went home beaming.⁴³

On the morning of September 1 the German offensive into Poland began. When Hitler spoke to the Reichstag, Germany’s one-party parliament, that day, he blamed the breakdown of negotiations—in which he had refused to participate—on Poland; recounted the incidents along the border—which he had ordered staged the preceding night; and contrasted these evil deeds of others with the great generosity of his own demands—which he had carefully withheld until they had lapsed. To the thunderous applause of the representatives of the German people, he announced that Germany was once more at war.⁴⁴

Almost every nation eventually participated in the new war, some as victims of attack, some as eager attackers themselves, some at the last moment in order to participate in the post-war world organization. A flood of blood and disaster of unprecedented magnitude had been let loose on the world. If the details of military operations and the localities of combat were often vastly different from those of World War I, the fearful anticipation that a new war would be as horrendous or quite likely even worse than the last proved all too accurate. There would be, however, no agitated discussion this time, as there had been after the crisis of 1914, of the question of who was responsible for the outbreak of war. It was all too clear that Germany had taken

the initiative and that others had tried, perhaps too much, but certainly very hard, to avert another great conflict. There would be no second "war guilt" debate.

Some of the developments in the great upheaval which changed the world were initiated and directed by Hitler's Germany, but many flowed from the initiatives and reactions of other countries. The concept Hitler wanted to implement, of a succession of wars, each started on his own initiative against victims of his choosing, each isolated from the other, but victory in each one facilitating a German victory in the next, fell short of realization from the very beginning when England and France declared war in support of Poland. The failure of the French to mount an offensive in the West in September 1939 almost enabled him to return to his original concept. Germany attacked in the West in 1940 very much the way Hitler had intended after crushing Poland in an isolated war; and his agreement with the Soviet Union enabled him to conduct the campaign in the West with all his forces on one front for the last time in the whole war. But then his thrust was halted by England and soon thereafter the dimensions of the conflict were increasingly out of his control. Even as he marched his armies to their destruction at the hands of the Red Army by invading the Soviet Union, the United States loomed ever more menacing on the horizon. Japan's advance in East Asia, urged insistently by Germany as a means of defeating Britain and diverting the United States from Europe, only contributed to the eventual arrival of American troops on German soil.

A critical element in Hitler's inability to adjust to the altering world balance around him was the fact that he had set out to change it dramatically himself and was prepared for his country and its people to perish in the attempt rather than turn back. Though some may consider him insane for attempting to implement the doctrine of *Lebensraum*, of living space, it was the essence of his policies at all times. Even the reality of internal German migration *westward* did not deter Hitler from attempting to lay the foundation for an external migration *eastward*. On February 1, 1939, he had felt obliged to issue an edict to try to reverse the process of migration within the existing borders which was denuding Germany's eastern provinces of their "Germanic" population.⁴⁵ But even such a grudgingly admitted engagement of current reality was not allowed to intrude upon his vision of long-term policy aims. As Hitler explained to his military commanders on May 23, 1939, the object of war was not Danzig but the expansion of Germany's *Lebensraum*.⁴⁶

The concept of revising the peace settlement of 1919 in Germany's favor, which he had ridiculed in his writings, remained for him a foolish

and rejected alternative even as he used it in his propaganda. In mid-October 1939, at a time when Germany and the Soviet Union were urging the Western Powers to make peace on the basis of an acceptance of what Germany and Russia had done to Poland, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, a great admirer of Germany, visited Hitler. The Führer explained that peace would be possible only if the British gave up "the foolish idea of a restoration of Czechoslovakia."⁴⁷ The vital point dividing him from the Western Powers was not that of Germany taking over areas inhabited by Germans or people of German descent but rather the seizure by Germany of lands hitherto inhabited by *other* peoples who were to be enslaved or exterminated and replaced by Germans. Under the diplomatic and geographic circumstances of the time, the Czechs were the first and the Poles the second of these peoples, but it was the process which was both the key point in Hitler's program and the galvanizing element in making his attack on Poland the occasion for a war wider than he preferred at that moment.

It was precisely because Hitler understood that his aims could be realized only by war that he plunged forward. Because he was always peculiarly conscious of his own mortality, and because he recognized that the limited material resources of the Germany he controlled in peacetime would assure him a headstart in armaments for only a few years before other nations caught up, he was in a hurry to start the first of his wars at the earliest possible moment according to his assessment of the diplomatic and military situation. Given the strides beginning to be made by the rearmament England and France had initiated in response to the new menace from Germany, one must concede a certain mad logic to his belief that time was running against his cherished goals.

Because of his preference for war, Hitler conducted policy in 1939 under the personal trauma of Munich. He had shrunk from war then—and thereafter attributed such cowardice to everyone else around him—and he would not be cheated once again of the war he had always intended. Just as his anger at having been deprived of war in 1938 made him all the more determined to have it in 1939, so his postponement of the attack on Poland on August 25 left him all the firmer in an almost hysterical fixation to attack a few days later. He would not back off again; his tirade to the would-be Swedish intermediary Birger Dahlerus on September 1, in which he declared himself ready to fight England for ten years if necessary,⁴⁸ reflects the views of a dictator who had once balked before the great risk, had then tried to minimize its scope, and was now under no circumstances willing to pull back a second time. Without war, his

whole program and his whole life made no sense to him. The war he started would destroy both.

There is a grim irony in the fact that most of the precautions Hitler took to make certain that there would be no diplomatic settlement of the 1939 crisis, no new Munich, were quite unnecessary. Not having agreed to the Munich treaty in good faith, he could never understand how anybody else could have; and hence, although he recognized how deeply the Western Powers were chagrined by his destruction of that settlement, he never comprehended that their policies were now based on different assumptions. When French Prime Minister Daladier declined Mussolini's suggestion of a conference, he stated that he would rather resign than attend a second "Munich."⁴⁹ Chamberlain was similarly determined that there would be no new Munich; and even had he wanted one, the British Parliament would never have allowed it after the German seizure of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939. Certainly no one in London was interested in exploring a new grab-bag of promises of future good behavior from a German dictator who had broken most of his earlier ones, was in the process of breaking some more of them, and was now offering to protect the British empire against his Italian ally, his Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact partner, and against his newly found Soviet friend.

The Poles were certain to fight for their independence. If the relatively conciliatory Polish Foreign Minister Josef Beck, the architect on the Polish side of the earlier rapprochement with Germany, was unwilling to accept subordination to Berlin, other Polish leaders were even less likely to consider submission a serious alternative for their country. The tragi-comedy of midnight, August 30-31, was entirely unnecessary, however revealing for participants and historians; the possibility of having his ostensible demands granted, to which Hitler had succumbed in 1938, simply did not exist in 1939. Had von Ribbentrop handed the demands to Henderson officially, Hitler would still have had his war.

Similarly, the great propaganda operations were hardly any more effective or necessary than the last-minute diplomatic moves. It was not necessary to persuade the German public of the need to fight Poland, and it was practically impossible to persuade them of the need to fight England and France. As for the outside world, all the reports of atrocities and incidents dreamed up by the fertile imagination of Germany's propaganda minister or secret police chief were unlikely to convince anyone who had lived through German use of similar tactics a year earlier. Perhaps all this noise was necessary for Hitler's self-induced excitement over the situation on Germany's eastern border, steeling him against doubts that might otherwise have assailed a man who on occasion shifted

tactics and procedures. Few others were affected; but the great tragedy of 1939 was that no one else needed to be affected. Hitler alone made the key decision, though those who had contributed toward the creation of that situation in so important and powerful a country as Germany, as well as those who carried it out without hesitation, have their share of the responsibility for that decision and its terrible results for the world.

2

FROM THE GERMAN AND SOVIET INVASIONS OF POLAND TO THE GERMAN ATTACK IN THE WEST: September 1, 1939 to May 10, 1940

THE WAR AGAINST POLAND

The German plan for the invasion of Poland had been developed since the spring of 1939 and was greatly assisted by the very favorable geographical position Germany had always had, a position further improved by the territorial changes of early 1939. It was the intention of the Germans to combine surprise coups to seize special objectives at, or even before, the moment of attack with a sudden overwhelming attack on two fronts carried forward by the mass of the German army supported by most of the German air force.¹ As Hitler had emphasized to his military leaders on August 22, it was Poland as a people that was to be destroyed; and therefore from the beginning it was assumed that massive slaughter of Poles and particularly the extermination of their political and cultural elite would both accompany and follow the campaign designed to destroy Poland's regained independence. The possibility of some kind of subordinate puppet government in a portion of occupied Poland was temporarily left open, but any such concept would be dropped quickly: German policy made collaboration impossible for self-respecting Poles and any individuals still so inclined were turned away by the Germans in any case.

The planned surprise coups for the most part failed; even the peacetime sending of a warship with a landing party into Danzig could not force the quick surrender of the minute Polish garrison there, and the attempted seizure of the strategically important railway bridge over the Vistula at Tszew (Dirschau) was thwarted as Polish engineers blew up the great span.² A portion of Poland's navy succeeded in escaping the German effort to destroy it, but the major land offensives were crushingly effective.

The Polish government had faced four problems in contemplation of any German attacks, and all were probably insoluble under the circumstances. In the first place, until 1939 the assumption had been that the

1934 agreement with Germany made it safe to confine military planning to the contingency of a renewal of the conflict with the Soviet Union, a conflict ended by the Peace Treaty of Riga of 1921, which had left to Poland substantial territory that had belonged to her before the partitions of the eighteenth century, but that the Soviet government was likely to want to recover. As German demands on Poland in the winter of 1938–39 made it increasingly evident that the more immediate danger was from the West, not the East, Polish military planning had to prepare for a new threat, but in this it was affected by three other great difficulties.

First, there was the absence of modern military equipment, with no prospect of Poland either producing it herself or obtaining it by purchase. Germany's headstart in rearmament made it impossible for Poland to buy—even had she had the necessary cash or credits—modern weapons elsewhere, while her own industries were not yet up to the production of the planes, tanks and artillery that would be needed to hold off a German attack. A second great difficulty lay in the puzzle of precisely what to defend against any German invasion. A concentration of Polish forces would expose most portions of the country to quick occupation; any attempt to defend the major industrial and population centers, on the other hand, practically guaranteed defeat at whichever points the Germans chose to attack with what would be overwhelming local superiority. The Polish general staff opted, on the whole, for the latter, broader defense strategy, with precisely the results that could be anticipated.

The final element in the Polish dilemma was that of timing: if Poland mobilized her forces as the danger in 1939 appeared more urgent, she would both damage her own fragile economy by the withdrawal of skilled labor from industry and simultaneously provide the Germans with propaganda opportunities for blaming Poland as responsible for the increase in tensions and the outbreak of any war that occurred. Alternatively, the government in Warsaw could postpone mobilization until the last moment, thereby keeping the economy functioning normally and warding off any blame for war, but the country would risk being caught by a German attack when not yet fully mobilized and prepared.

The Polish government opted for the latter alternative, and this option also would have the effect that could be anticipated. It meant that militarily the armed forces of the country were caught in the middle of mobilization and could be defeated all the more quickly; but the choice must be seen in its political and historical context. The years since 1914 had seen a vast public debate and an enormous controversial literature about the causes of the Great War and the responsibility for its outbreak. We have already seen how Hitler had concluded that the way to deal with this question was to pick the time for an attack, fake an incident at the

appropriate moment, and concoct a reasonable sounding set of demands to release to the public after war had started in order to consolidate the German home front and place the blame on the others. The Polish government, in part still hoping to avoid war altogether, in part at the urging of the Western Allies, took the opposite course of trying to avoid incidents and postponing mobilization, the sequence of mobilizations in 1914 having been a major element in the debate about the outbreak of that conflict.³

As already mentioned, the inclination to postpone mobilization was reinforced by advice to this effect from London and Paris. If such advice was heeded in Warsaw—to its own ultimate great cost—the political context in which Poland found herself was of the greatest importance. Only the firm support of Great Britain and France for Poland offered any real hope of either deterring Germany from attacking her at all or, alternatively, defeating Germany if the Third Reich did attack. Like Serbia or Belgium in World War I, a Poland battered and even largely occupied might recover her independence—and perhaps even enlarge her territories—within a victorious Allied coalition; but only if, first, there was such a coalition, second, if it were clear to all that the attack on her was unprovoked, and third, if she had done whatever was possible with her limited means to contribute to the cause by fighting in her own defense.

It was, therefore, essential that Poland be seen as the victim of unprovoked aggression by the governments and public of Britain and France, and the diplomacy of Polish Foreign Minister Josef Beck as well as the military posture of the Polish government have to be seen as designed to achieve such a situation. That meant restraint in the face of German provocation, a restraint which created the desired impression in London and Paris and which, as we now know, also greatly annoyed the Germans, who were desperate for politically plausible pretexts to inaugurate hostilities.⁴

At the same time, the Polish government would do what it could to defend against attack and contribute to the cause of an Allied victory over Germany. In July of 1939 the Polish code-breaking experts with the approval of their government turned over to the French and British duplicates of Polish reproductions of the German enigma machine used for encoding radio messages. By this step and related ones Poland made a major contribution to the whole Allied war effort, which has tended to be obscured by the excessive award of credit to themselves in French and British accounts of what came to be known as the “ultra” secret.⁵ The Polish armed forces would certainly fight as hard as they could, even in seemingly impossible situations.

There was some hope in Warsaw, more reasonable at the time than might appear in retrospect, that, with a French offensive in the West, which they had been promised in May 1939, forcing the Germans to divert substantial forces to their Western border, it would be possible for the Polish army to hold out in at least portions of the eastern parts of the country through the winter. Developments which will be reviewed subsequently dashed both hopes: the French did not attack in the West as they had promised, and the Soviet Union broke its non-aggression pact with Warsaw and invaded Poland from the east. Under these circumstances, Polish forces would be defeated in their home country, but many members escaped across the borders of Hungary and Romania and joined others already in the West to form new military units. Later augmented by men released from Soviet camps, these units participated in the war until Allied victory in 1945.

But these developments were shrouded in a distant and desperate future as German forces struck on September 1.⁶ In the first days of the campaign, the German air force swept the skies clear of what few modern planes the Polish air force could deploy and thereafter devoted all its strength to supporting the invasion by the German army. In the north, units of the German 4th Army quickly covered the fifty miles separating Pomerania from East Prussia. While the 3rd Army lunged southeastward from East Prussia to reach first the Narev and then the Bug river in order to cut behind Warsaw and the Polish forces defending the central portions of the country, larger German forces struck northeastwards from Silesia and through German-occupied sections of Slovakia as the German 8th, 10th, and 14th Armies cut their way through the defending Polish forces into the heart of the country.

The first week of fighting saw the German invaders ripping open the main Polish defenses; during the second week the major Polish forces were surrounded or pushed back as German units fought in the outskirts of Warsaw. Polish counter-attacks as well as the break-out attempts of surrounded or almost surrounded Polish units repeatedly caused local defeats or delays for the Germans, while some of the isolated Polish garrisons fought on bravely in the face of overwhelming odds. Polish units in and around Warsaw resisted fiercely and effectively, but the signs of defeat were all too obvious. The Polish government had to evacuate the capital and would eventually cross the border into Romania; but even before this final step, the mechanism of control over the armed forces of the state was in terrible disarray, a disarray not only due to the speed of the German advance and the evacuation of the capital but also to the bombing of the Polish transportation system with its few, often single-track, railways. At the time when Poland was supposed to receive

the relief of a French offensive in the West, which had been promised for the fifteenth day after French mobilization at the latest, she instead found herself invaded by the Soviet Union from the east.

The Soviet and French policies behind these developments deserve and will receive separate description; here they must first be seen in the role they played in the crushing of Polish resistance. From the German point of view, the most rapid possible defeat of Poland was seen as enormously important. Certainly concern over the deteriorating weather in the late fall was a major element in this, but this was by no means the only factor. From the military perspective, the quicker the victory, the less likely effective support of or supplies to Poland could be provided by anyone. The quicker the German victory the more likely a return to the original concept of separating the attack on Poland from the attacks in the West for which it was to provide a quiet Eastern Front. But even if speedy victory did not serve that purpose, it would in any case enable the German government to redeploy its forces to the Western Front in case of any dangerous developments there. This desire for speed not only influenced the German conduct of military operations, but must be seen as a major factor in German diplomatic maneuvers during the first days of the war. Berlin made a concerted effort to enlist as many allies as possible in the attack on Poland, hoping thereby to hasten the victory and perhaps isolate the campaign in the East by a new temporary settlement from the war in the West for which additional preparation would be useful.

The Germans not only used the territory of the puppet state of Slovakia⁷ as a base for attacking Poland from the south but urged the regime installed there to take a formal part in the war. The government of Joseph Tiso agreed to go beyond the use of its territories to an active role for its German-drilled soldiers in the attack on Poland, a policy rewarded by Germany with some 300 square miles of Poland, much of which had once been included in Czechoslovakia and were in the part of Poland allocated to Germany by the Nazi-Soviet Pact—a shrewd German move designed both to speed up the campaign and to give Slovakia a vested interest in whatever new arrangements Germany might wish to establish in the defeated country.⁸

The destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 had not only brought German domination of Slovakia but had also assured Hungary a common border with Poland, when Budapest had been instructed by the government in Berlin to occupy the eastern extremity of Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia or the Carpatho-Ukraine.⁹ Here too the Germans tried hard in September 1939 to bring another ally into the war on Poland. They asked the Hungarian government to allow German troops and

supplies to move across Hungarian territory, dangling pieces of Poland in front of their eyes as bait.¹⁰ The government in Budapest had territorial claims on Romania, not Poland, and had long looked on Poland as a potential ally in the future, as Magyars and Poles had considered each other friends in the past. They were at this time also very much concerned that joining Germany would mean war with Britain and France as well as Poland. To the annoyance of Germany, Hungary remained neutral, and by permitting numerous Poles to escape across its territory hardly endeared itself to Berlin; but there was at the moment little the German government could do but growl.

Another potential but equally unwilling ally in the war on Poland was less fortunate. In the hope of making the Polish cause look utterly futile, the Germans tried hard to secure the participation of Lithuania in the conflict. Here they thought themselves in an especially good bargaining position. Although once joined by a personal union into one dynastically united state, Lithuania and Poland in the years of their new independence since 1918 had been anything but friends. The two countries both claimed the city of Vilna and the territory surrounding it; and since Vilna had long been the capital of Lithuania in prior centuries, its inclusion in Poland as well as the deliberate bullying of the smaller by the larger country, especially in 1938, seemed to open up the possibility of recruiting Lithuania as a German ally. Furthermore, in their secret pre-war negotiation with the Soviet Union, the Germans had not only secured Soviet agreement to the incorporation of Lithuania into the German sphere of influence but also to its expansion by Vilna (Vilnius) and adjacent territory out of the part of Poland otherwise scheduled for inclusion in the Soviet sphere. The government of Lithuania, however, refused to attack its neighbor, hoping to remain neutral and reluctant to join a Nazi Germany at war with Britain and France. The German government was extremely annoyed; and in this case, unlike that of Hungary, would soon find a way of punishing the Lithuanians for dragging their feet when Berlin sounded the trumpet. By the end of September, Lithuania had been traded to the Soviet Union for an added portion of Poland.¹¹

From the very beginning, the ally most sought by Berlin in the attack on Poland was of course the Soviet Union. First Prussia and then the new Germany of 1871 had looked to Russia as a partner in the reduction, then the elimination and thereafter the suppression of any new independent Poland. Its revival at the end of World War I had altered the current details but not the fundamental perceptions of policy toward Poland in Berlin and Moscow. No substantial elements in either government ever recognized the possibility that a sovereign Poland, however

unpleasant that country's revival might be, provided each with a measure of protection against the other while itself unable to threaten either, once both had recovered from the upheavals of the revolutionary period 1918–23. Hatred of Poland was a major factor in bringing Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union together.¹² It influenced both the policies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia toward each other as well as their conduct in Poland once they had again divided it between themselves.

In the early years of National Socialist rule in Germany the government had, at the personal insistence of Hitler and against the preference of his diplomatic and military advisors, put the anti-Polish line in abeyance while pursuing other aims. Precisely because Hitler's long-term aims were so vastly greater than could be satisfied at the expense of Poland, he was more willing to make tactical concessions in German–Polish relations for a short time. During that time, a Germany which had no common border with the Soviet Union and had temporarily shelved the anti-Polish line could easily wave off the approaches for a rapprochement with Moscow which Stalin made periodically.¹³ Once the Poles had refused to subordinate themselves to Germany so that the latter could feel safe in attacking in the West, however, this situation changed. Now the Soviet Union was again a plausible ally against Poland, and the hints of a possible alignment emanating from Moscow had accordingly met with a very different reception in 1939.

The implications for the conduct of war of the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939, with its secret provisions for dividing Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe between the two powers, require additional examination at this point. The German desire for speed in the operations against Poland meant that the earlier Soviet intervention into the fighting came, the better it would be. The original dividing line agreed upon on August 23 would bring the Red Army to the east bank of the Vistula in the suburbs of Warsaw, and since the *distance* Soviet forces would have to move to the demarcation line was greater than that which faced the Germans, an early Soviet start could only be welcomed in Berlin. While most Polish forces faced the Germans, the road and railway networks in the area to be occupied by the Soviet were worse, a transportation problem accentuated by the change of railway gage at the Polish–Soviet frontier.

Under these circumstances, the German government began urging the Soviet Union to move into Poland in the first days of hostilities and repeated this request ever more insistently thereafter. Berlin stressed the speed of the German advance and the rapid collapse of Polish resistance as well as the problems created by the retreat of Polish formations eastward. The Germans pointed out that they would either have to

pursue Polish forces further and further into the area allocated to the Soviet Union or see new regimes established there. Surely the Russian government would wish to move quickly into the territory it was scheduled to obtain.¹⁴

From the perspective of Moscow the situation did not look quite so simple. The evidence suggests that the Soviet government anticipated neither the rapid German initial advance nor the subsequent holding out of Polish forces in the Warsaw area; the former misjudgement led them to think they had more time to prepare than was actually the case, while the latter appears to have reinforced Stalin's concern about any Polish survival in a rump state should one be created.

The Soviet leader's initial inclination to delay an invasion of Poland from the east was reinforced by several considerations. In the first place, there was the need to mobilize Soviet armed forces for the attack; a process which would take some time, especially since some of the forces to be employed came from the interior portions of the U.S.S.R.¹⁵ and some had to be brought from the Far East.¹⁶ Secondly, Stalin appears to have placed considerable emphasis on so arranging the timing of the attack as to make it plausible domestically and externally as a measure for the recovery of lands in large part previously included in Russia at a time when the Polish state had effectively ceased to exist, rather than as an act of aggression imitating and joining the German one. Finally, the fighting between Soviet and Japanese troops on the border of their respective puppet states was still in progress, though a decisive Soviet victory there had come with an offensive on August 20. The Soviet government indicated to Tokyo that it wanted to settle the incident on August 22 (the day before von Ribbentrop's arrival in Moscow).¹⁷

As interested in avoiding war on two fronts as the Germans—though more careful and successful at this than Hitler—Stalin wanted to make certain that the situation in East Asia was under control before launching military operations in Europe. This aim was assisted not only by the victory of Soviet troops in late August but by a combination of two additional factors. First, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact—which had opened up the possibility of invading Poland in concert with Germany in the first place—had quite literally collapsed the government in Tokyo. Imagining themselves engaged in negotiations with Germany for an alliance *against* the Soviet Union, the leaders of Japan learned to their consternation that their prospective European ally had signed a non-aggression pact with the very power against which they were fighting a losing battle and had hoped to secure German pressure. The government in Tokyo resigned and the new Prime Minister there had difficulty even finding a suitable Foreign Minister for some time and had to hold

on to both positions for a month. That under these circumstances the Japanese ambassador in Moscow was instructed to negotiate an armistice on terms which in effect accepted the Soviet claims in the border dispute should not be surprising, and that the Germans in their eagerness for a quick Soviet move in Europe should do their best to facilitate an agreement between their pre-war and their new-found friend should also be easy to understand.

A second element facilitating a Soviet-Japanese agreement was that, just as the Tokyo government was eager to end the disastrous fighting at Nomonhan (Khalkhin-gol), Stalin's own sense of urgency about the European situation as the speed of the German advance became obvious led him to refrain from further possible offensive operations in the border fighting and instead agree to a settlement which the Japanese government could accept without extreme humiliation.¹⁸ The Soviet-Japanese armistice agreement of September 15 provided for a cease-fire on the following day; but well before the agreement was reached, at least by September 9, it must have been obvious to the Moscow authorities that the conflict in East Asia was about to end and all attention could be concentrated on her western border.¹⁹

It was in this context that the Soviet government withdrew its ambassador to Poland as well as most of the embassy personnel on September 11, the same day that the Soviet press reported on the collapse of Polish resistance.²⁰ Although in fact some Polish resistance was to continue for another three weeks, it must have looked to Stalin that any substantial further delay entailed two equally great risks: there might be a German-Polish armistice which would leave the Soviet Union entering a war already concluded, on the one hand, or German advances into the depths—not just the fringes—of the part of Poland allocated to Russia, which might in turn encourage the Germans to demand a shift of the partition line in their favor, on the other.²¹ Moving up the timetable as much as possible, the Soviet leader notified the Germans that the Red Army would attack on September 17, excusing the violation of the Soviet Union's treaties with Poland by declaring that state to have ceased to exist. The day before, on September 16, the Soviet government had recognized the puppet state of Slovakia, thus giving public notice of its belief—unique outside the Axis—that Czechoslovakia had also ended its legal existence.²²

The political implications of these Soviet actions, and simultaneous ones in the Baltic and Balkan areas, will be examined later; here it is important to record the immediate meaning of the Soviet invasion for Poland. The advancing Red Army eliminated any prospect of Polish forces taking advantage of the temporary check of German forces before

Warsaw to organize continued resistance in the communications-poor forests and swamps of eastern Poland; it also quickly forced the Polish government and remaining soldiers to cross the border into Romania and Lithuania (and to a lesser extent Hungary) before Soviet occupation closed off the last escape routes. Several hundred thousand Polish soldiers came to be Russian prisoners of war—a subject we will have sad occasion to return to—and would be followed into exile in the interior of the U.S.S.R. by hundreds of thousands of other Poles deported from their homes once the Soviet-occupied territories had been annexed to the Soviet Union.²³

Under these circumstances, the Soviet intervention had the military effect hopefully anticipated by the Germans. They could coordinate the last stages of the campaign with the Red Army in a process that involved some technical problems but none that proved insurmountable.²⁴ The failure to inform the advancing German units of the terms of the planned eventual partition lines caused some confusion, but in a few days in the period September 20–26 the German troops pulled back to the line agreed upon on August 23. They left all Polish forces east of that line to the tender mercies of the Red Army while themselves concentrating on crushing the remaining centers of Polish resistance. By the end of the month, this process was essentially completed. At this time in the war the Germans were enthusiastic advocates of unconditional surrender, which was required of the Warsaw garrison. Other remaining isolated centers of Polish resistance were also beaten down in the last days of September and the first days of October.²⁵ The fighting in Poland had ended. A million Polish soldiers had been captured by the Germans and Russians; over 100,000 had died; something over 200,000 had fled across the borders. The whole country was once again occupied by foreign troops who would install new systems of terror—one animated by racial and the other by class ideology.

The victors' losses were far smaller.²⁶ The German casualties of about 45,000 would affect her subsequent campaigns and military buildup only minimally,²⁷ while the Soviet casualties of 2,600 barely justified Stalin's proud assertion of December 1939 that the friendship of Germany and the Soviet Union had been "cemented with blood."²⁸ More important was the question whether they could turn their joint victory over Poland into wider and more lasting gains either in the immediately affected territories of Eastern Europe or in the broader realm of international affairs.

The German government had left open the possibility of some minimal rump-Poland from the beginning, but as will be seen, dropped this idea as soon as the Soviet Union indicated that it would be happier

without such a contraption.^a Given the relative insignificance of Polish territory in the framework of Hitler's broader ambitions and aims, it is easy to understand why the attack on Poland was not preceded by the kind of extensive and detailed planning for administrative and economic measures, running parallel with the precise preparations for military operations that were to characterize the preliminaries for the invasion of the Soviet Union during 1940-41.²⁹ Big pieces of Poland were annexed to Germany; and in line with Hitler's insistent denunciation of any and all attempts to regain the German borders of the pre-Versailles Treaty era, the new lines had nothing in common with Germany's borders of 1914.³⁰ The Poles living in these areas would be driven out. Here would be demonstrated the alternative procedure for relating people to boundaries which the Germans were determined to substitute for that followed at the end of World War I. At that time, an effort had been made to adjust state boundaries to population with plebiscites in areas of uncertainty and the possibility of "option," or transfer to the other state with one's property, a last resort meant for those who did not wish to live within the state into which new boundaries placed them. All this was now to be reversed. Under the new system, the victor would set the boundary wherever he thought appropriate at the moment and any people he did not want on one side of the border would be shoved, preferably without their property, to the other. Instead of fitting boundaries to people, the victor would fit the people to new boundaries—a procedure heralded in the German-Italian agreements for the transfer of Germans from the South Tyrol,³¹ but first applied radically to Poles in the territories newly annexed to Germany. Like so many German innovations, this one too ended up being applied to them; but its first desperate victims were those Poles driven out of their homes to wander in the winter of 1939-40 in search of new homes.

But where could they go? While the vast stretches of Poland directly annexed to Germany were to be emptied of Poles to be replaced by German settlers, all preferably without any of the Catholic religious institutions once so strong in the area,³² a substantial portion of central Poland was placed into a special category of exploited territory called the "General Government" under the direction of the National Socialist Hans Frank. By a redrawing of the August 23 partition line which will

^a It is at times asserted that the German abandonment of the idea of a rump-Poland was caused by the refusal of the Allies to arrange peace with Germany after the German victory in Poland. This interpretation cannot be fitted into the chronology. Hitler's September 19 speech in Danzig already foreshadowed the positive German response to the Soviet suggestion of that date that there be no Polish state at all. The German views of September 19 and 20 can hardly be interpreted as a response to Chamberlain's speech of October 12 (which is discussed subsequently).

be examined in the context of German–Soviet relations, this structure came to include, after September 28, 1939, an additional portion of central Poland previously allocated to the Soviet Union. After July 17, 1941, still more of southeast Poland, under Soviet control from 1939–41 but seized by the German army in the first stage of the invasion of Russia, would also be added to it.³³ In this whole area the Germans, beginning in September 1939, experimented with the most extreme of their concepts for ruling occupied territories and subject peoples: forced deliveries of food, mass executions of the political, cultural and religious elite, random slaughter of civilians, massive levies of forced labor, new settlement and resettlement projects according to the latest brain waves of various officials, and, beginning in the winter of 1941–42, the wholesale murder of Polish and Central and Western European Jews. Before setting out on this whole program, Hitler had described his intentions in broad and candid terms and had tried to reassure any doubters among his military commanders by reminding them that the uproar caused by the massacres of the Armenians earlier in the century had quietened down with time.³⁴

What would have happened subsequently had Germany won the war is too awful to envisage; her loss of it meant that the application of such policies was halted, and, in addition, the role Germans had played in Eastern Europe in preceding centuries came to an abrupt end. In an earlier age, German settlement and expansion had meant conflict accompanied by some economic development and some cultural advances; now it meant conflict leading only to economic exploitation, the elimination of cultural life, and death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. Hans Frank, the man Hitler put in charge of this area, never appreciated the irony in his design to have the Government General settled by Germans and then called the Gau (or district) of the Vandals, named thus for that fine group of Germanic people which he believed maligned by anti-German propaganda, and who in his imagination had first brought the blessings of Germanic culture to this portion of the globe.³⁵

More will be said about Poland in Chapters 9 and 13, but here we must return to the events of September 1939 as German and Soviet forces completed the occupation of the country. The original partition plans of the two governments had cut the major area of Polish settlement at the Vistula river and had left open the question of some form of a rump-Polish state. From the German point of view, which looked toward an attack in the West as the necessary prerequisite for a subsequent invasion of Russia, the Polish question was always of a subordinate tactical nature. From the perspective of the Soviet Union, however, the question looked very different. While hating the Poles about as much

as the Germans, the Soviet leaders as devout adherents of what they generally called Marxism–Leninism considered what they labelled the Second Imperialist War a struggle over markets and investments between nations of monopoly capitalism. There was no room in their thinking then or later for the idea that Hitler's agrarian expansionist concepts of a racial Social Darwinism might be the well-spring of German policy, not merely a propaganda device to delude the German masses. A new settlement in Eastern Europe, once it had been worked out with the German government, might therefore be lasting, not temporary, and could establish the framework from within which the Soviet Union would observe the capitalist world for decades to come.

From this perspective, the events of mid-September 1939 suggested to Stalin that some rearrangements in the deal with Germany might be in order. The Western Powers had not only declared war on Germany but gave every sign of continuing to fight. If they did make peace with Germany after all, then it would be best to collect all that the secret agreement with Germany promised her and to do so quickly lest peace break out before the booty had been collected. But if the war indeed continued, there would be great advantage to the Soviet Union in leaving the major nominal cause of that continuance—the Polish question—to the Germans. The fact that even after the initial German victories the Polish forces in central Poland continued to fight bravely, and that this caused the German army to have to continue for a while fighting Poles within the portion of the country assigned to the Soviet Union, can only have reminded Stalin of the extent to which national sentiments animated a large part of the Polish population. Both considerations pointed in the same direction from Soviet perspective: no Polish rump state and fewer Poles on the Soviet side of the new border. Stalin informed the Germans on September 19 that he had now concluded that it would be better not to allow any kind of Polish state³⁶—a proposal the Germans promptly accepted—and on September 25 personally suggested a highly significant alteration in the boundary between the Soviet and the German lines of influence as agreed on August 23.³⁷

The Germans themselves had some ideas on small adjustments in the new border, in particular at the southern end, where they would greatly have liked to obtain the Polish oil fields across the agreed line at Boris-lav-Drogobic. The Soviet leaders would make additional concessions on oil shipments to Germany, and they even agreed to give the Germans a small additional piece of Poland at the other end of the border by letting them have the Suwalki area, which included a lovely forest for the disappointed German Foreign Minister to hunt in; but they were insistent on

retaining the San river line and thus the oil fields as provided in the secret protocol of August 23.³⁸ On the other hand, in the middle portion of the new border they themselves proposed a major change. They would turn over to the Germans a substantial portion of central Poland between the Vistula and Bug rivers in exchange for the Lithuanian state, which the two powers had previously agreed to enlarge by the Vilna area.

From the Soviet point of view, such a shift would bring the Germans substantially further east in the central part of their common border while pushing them further west at the northern end. It would leave the Soviet Union with very large stretches of east Poland in which, however, the non-Polish portion of the population—the Belorussians and the Ukrainians—constituted a majority. It would place all three Baltic States within the Soviet sphere, something Stalin might have preferred from the beginning. If that had been his preference, he could not easily insist on it in the August negotiations, in which the Germans had originally proposed dividing them in such a fashion that each would get all of one and half of the middle one by dividing Latvia at the Dvina river. The Germans had agreed to cede all of Latvia to the Soviet Union at that time, but if Stalin wanted Lithuania already then, he clearly found it wiser to postpone asking for it. Now he offered a large part of Poland in exchange.

From the German point of view, the advantages of such a trade were not as obvious. The Germans were planning to take control of the enlarged Lithuania along lines that, as far as can be determined, would have been somewhat similar at the beginning to those governing Germany's relations with the puppet state of Slovakia.³⁹ Whether it would suit her diplomatically to do so right away—as the Soviets were doing with Estonia and Latvia—was unclear. The possibility of additional territories for German settlement directly adjacent to East Prussia was more attractive than the geographically more remote portion of Poland being offered; on the other hand, the latter was considered considerably better agricultural land. The possibility of friction with the Soviet Union in regard to Polish questions if the central area of Polish population remained divided between the two countries had to be weighed against the disadvantage of appearing to the outside world as the primary element in the subjection of Poland. Hitler authorized von Ribbentrop to agree to the trade, possibly influenced by the recalcitrant attitude of the Lithuanians when they had been asked to join the attack on Poland.⁴⁰

In the negotiations on this question during his second trip to Moscow, von Ribbentrop secured a small piece of Poland on the right bank of the Bug river in order to straighten out the line created

by the rivers, as well as a piece of Lithuania to round out the Suwalki area—territories Stalin could afford to give up as he was getting back the Vilna portion of east Poland previously scheduled to go to Germany when it took Lithuania. Before the other portions of the series of new German–Soviet agreements of September 28 are discussed, it should be noted that the new German–Soviet border would not only include all three Baltic States in the Soviet sphere but have major implications for the subsequent fate of Poland, its relations with the Soviet Union, and the latter's relations with the rest of the world.

The other agreements worked out by the German and Soviet governments at the end of September 1939 reflected their joint interest in supporting each other's desire for a rearrangement of Eastern Europe in accord with the preference of Berlin and Moscow but without regard for those of either the smaller countries of the area or the Western Powers as the basis for their friendship with each other. They promised to suppress any and all attempts of the Poles to regain their independence. The good relations the two powers would have with each other were to be cemented by population exchanges at the new boundary between them; and, in accordance with this principle, those of German descent in the Baltic States which were now all in the Soviet sphere were to be allowed to move to Germany (which could then settle them in portions of Poland to replace dispossessed or murdered Poles).⁴¹ New economic arrangements were to be worked out and these would be designed to assist Germany if her war with the Western Powers continued. But the two new joint masters of Eastern Europe called upon the West to withdraw from the war, accepting the end of the independence of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic States as Germany and the Soviet Union had just arranged and agreed.⁴²

Both proceeded to move forward with this program, rearranging Eastern Europe to suit their preference and launching a combined propaganda campaign calling on the British and French to make peace on that basis. While the Germans took steps to rearrange the enormous portions of Poland they had seized, the Soviet government consolidated its hold on eastern Poland, pressured the Baltic States into accepting Soviet military and diplomatic control, and began a diplomatic campaign of pressure on Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland to extend Soviet territory and influence in those directions in accord with the German–Soviet agreements.⁴³

While the two powers reordered the affairs of Eastern Europe and waited to see whether their call for a return to peace under the newly

changed circumstances would be rewarded by a favorable answer, their relationship with each other could proceed on several levels. They worked out a series of new economic agreements in further detailed negotiations, not only to implement their prior economic treaty of August 19 and the special oil delivery and railway transit agreements growing out of the discussions of the Borislav-Drogobic oil fields,⁴⁴ but going far beyond such relatively minor matters to a massive exchange of Soviet raw materials for German manufactured products, technical designs and equipment, and other specialized items. The formal new economic treaty was not signed until February 11, 1940, and in the intervening weeks there had to be extended and at times rather difficult further negotiations, conducted for the most part in Moscow and with the repeated personal involvement of Stalin. When signed, it provided the economic basis with which Germany could be confident of her ability to attack in the West—there would be enough oil for her tanks, enough manganese for her steel industry, and enough grain for her soldiers and workers.⁴⁵ And in regard to those products which the Soviet Union could not supply from her own resources, she would assist Germany by purchasing them for her elsewhere in the world or transporting them across Soviet territory to Germany if the latter purchased them herself.⁴⁶

Even while the economic relations of the two powers were being worked out, the Soviet Union supplemented its political support of the combined peace propaganda campaign—in which the Comintern played a prominent part—with direct assistance to Germany in the naval sphere. An extensive series of measures supported German naval warfare against the Western Powers; it included the provision of a special naval base at Western Litsa Bay near the major Soviet port of Murmansk, the use of other Soviet ports, and, eventually making possible the movement of a German auxiliary cruiser around Siberia into the northern Pacific to prey on Allied shipping.⁴⁷ Simultaneously, the Soviet government rebuffed the slightest gestures which might imply better relations with the Western Powers; the long-term advocate of better British-Soviet relations, Sir Stafford Cripps, could not even get a visa to visit the country.⁴⁸

In return, the Soviets demanded, and within limits the Germans agreed to assist in, the building up of Soviet naval power on which Stalin personally and repeatedly insisted. Before the war, the Soviet leader had looked primarily to the United States for technical and construction help in the development of a Soviet blue-water navy. He had sought and obtained some naval supplies, especially for submarines, from the Third

Reich,⁴⁹ but he had tried unsuccessfully to have a battleship built in the United States and had made other attempts at receiving American assistance for a modernized and enlarged fleet.⁵⁰ Now he turned to Germany, which found it expedient to use naval equipment, naval plans, and even an uncompleted cruiser as part payment for raw materials delivered by the Soviet Union.

Here too the contrasting perspectives of Hitler and Stalin are revealed. The Soviet leader was willing to help Germany fight its current war with the Western Powers while looking to the long-term buildup of Soviet power, in this instance in the naval field, in a world torn by war only among the capitalist powers. Hitler, on the other hand, wanted whatever assistance he could get to win the war with the West, which he had always considered the great and difficult prerequisite for unlimited territorial expansion eastwards. He was confident that any improvements the Russians could make in their navy in the interim would make no difference in the outcome of Germany's big move east when it came.⁵¹ If the Soviets would trade oil for the engineering plans of the German battleship *Bismarck*, he was certain of accomplishing his aims long before the Soviets could build their version of the *Bismarck* or even complete the unfinished cruiser *Lützow*.⁵² What counted was the immediate situation in the West.

THE WAR IN THE WEST AND AT SEA

What was the situation in the West? There the Germans were formally at war with Great Britain and France. The two Western Powers were committed to defending Poland against unprovoked attack, France by a long-standing treaty of alliance, England by a promise publicly made at the end of March and confirmed by the alliance signed in late August of 1939. When the news of the German invasion of Poland reached London and Paris early on the morning of September 1, decisions had to be made promptly in both capitals. Because these decisions were based on contradictory advice from their respective military advisors, the two governments found it difficult to harmonize their immediate diplomatic steps.⁵³

The London government was from the beginning insistent on a withdrawal of German forces from Poland if general war were still to be averted; the French government, because of some residual inner divisions, was not quite as clear. Since the Italians attempted some last-minute efforts at restoring peace and the Germans hoped that the news of quick and substantial military victories might yet discourage Britain and France from honoring their pledges to Poland, there was another

day's delay in implementing the decision for war. The British military advisors were telling their government to move with speed from any ultimatum to a formal declaration of war because of their concern about a possible German surprise air attack in the interval. This concept of a possible knock-out blow on London from the air being struck by waves of German planes at the height of a crisis—something on the order of a Pearl Harbor attack on England's most important city—had haunted British military thinking in prior years.

The French government was hearing opposite advice from its military advisors. They were concerned about air or land attacks interfering with French mobilization, and therefore wanted a maximum amount of time in order to complete as much of the mobilization process as possible before any declaration of war. Here was a divergence between the prospective allies at the very beginning of a war that was certain to strain both, one especially hard to resolve in a situation where Chamberlain faced a parliament overwhelmingly determined to move quickly—but which could hardly be enlightened about the divergent military advice received in London and Paris. Under these circumstances, the British moved ahead of the French but not so much as to make it too obvious that they were pulling a still partially reluctant French government behind them. At the last minute the expiration time of the French ultimatum to Germany was moved up twelve hours so that, although still a few hours after the British, the two declarations of war on Germany came on the same date: September 3, 1939.

It was of enormous importance for the conduct of the war which began that day, that the cumulative experience of others with Germany in prior years was to bring in on the side of London and Paris allies who came to share a significant portion of the war's burden. Australia, New Zealand, and a few days later Canada declared war on Germany. In the Union of South Africa (as it was then called), the government in power did not wish to join in. There was a bitter parliamentary fight; a new government under Jan C. Smuts replaced that of James B. M. Hertzog; and that Dominion also declared war on Germany on September 6.^a

The British-controlled government of India declared war on Germany without consulting the representatives of the major Indian political parties, a step that was to have important repercussions subsequently. The Irish Free State, on the other hand, refused to join the other Dominions

^a Some of the opponents of war with Germany sympathized with National Socialism, and the leaders of this faction would take over the government in Pretoria in 1948, dominating the government of what was to become the Republic of South Africa thereafter. On the role of the new Prime Minister who took South Africa into war in the September 1939 crisis, see Kenneth Ingham, *Jan Christian Smuts: The Conscience of a South African* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), pp. 205-7.

and proclaimed its neutrality. In some relatively minor areas of military affairs, the Irish Free State would make supportive gestures, preferably in secret, to assist Britain,⁵⁴ but on major issues—such as Britain's use for anti-submarine warfare of the treaty ports which had originally been reserved for the Royal Navy and had only recently been turned over to full control from Dublin—the Prime Minister of Ireland, Eamon de Valera, would resist all pleas from London.⁵⁵ Here was a subject reopened repeatedly during the war; de Valera never budged, and this, too, had repercussions not only during World War II but into the rest of the century.

How was a war against Germany to be fought? Having begun their rearmament program long after Germany, the British and French believed themselves behind in armaments, especially in the air and on land. Their basic strategy, therefore, was to remain on the defensive in the first stages of war. If Germany could be held in check, Britain and France could continue to build up their air forces, France could hopefully purchase additional planes in the United States to make up for deficiencies in its own air force, while the British could move forward seriously with the buildup of a substantial army, conscription having been introduced earlier in 1939. As this program went forward, the naval forces of the Allies would destroy German and protect Allied shipping. Furthermore, a reading of World War I which included the belief that the blockade had made a great contribution to victory in 1918 suggested that in spite of major changes—such as the opening of a huge hole in any blockade by the German–Soviet Pact—blockade might once again play such a role.

This misperception, as we now know it to have been, was reinforced by another perception which was even more removed from reality. It was widely believed, and continued to be believed until well into the war, that Germany's economy was severely strained and operating at full or near-full capacity, so that any substantial interference with that economy was likely to have serious repercussions on her capacity to fight. The building up of Allied forces while Germany was assumed to have already reached a pitch of military and economic efficiency was expected to open up the prospect for Allied offensive operations after an initial period of defensive fighting.

The staff talks of the British and French in the spring of 1939, which examined the contingencies then facing the two powers, had considered a war started by Germany and Italy as the most likely one, with their enemies looking at the time element from the opposite point of view, that is, looking to early victory from successful early offensives mounted at a time of Axis military superiority, in order to avoid the likely shifting

of the military balance over time as the strength of the Allies increased. The conclusions drawn by the British and French from this have been aptly summarized in the British official history as pointing to the following view of war:

first a mainly defensive phase directed towards maintaining as far as possible the integrity of the two empires but during which no opportunity should be lost to achieve, without undue cost, successes against Italy calculated to reduce her will to fight; then a second phase directed towards holding Germany and dealing decisively with Italy; then the final objective, the defeat of Germany.⁵⁶

How long would such a war take? On September 6 the Secretary of State for War in the War Cabinet in London asserted that it should be assumed that the war would last "at least five years."⁵⁷

A problem which this set of assumptions and the conclusions drawn from them did not address directly was the situation to be faced by Poland, the country both Britain and France had pledged themselves to assist if attacked.^a The assumption throughout was that Poland in World War II, like Serbia in World War I, would be overrun during hostilities but restored to independence after an Allied victory. Neither Western Power expected that the Soviet Union, if so inclined, could do much to assist Poland against Germany except by providing some supplies (though able to do a considerable amount to defend *herself* if attacked). There is no evidence that an immediate offensive into Germany if she attacked Poland was ever considered. Theoretically such a move could be seen as dangerous to Germany and highly advantageous for the Allies. German forces would be busy in the East and weakest in the West. But there was no substantial British army available to participate in such an operation, and the French government and military leaders were united in their refusal to contemplate offensive operations on the Western Front by themselves.

Without any willingness of Belgium to participate in such an operation, any offensive would have had to be launched at precisely that portion of the German border best covered by the defenses of the Westwall, as the Germans called what the Allies referred to as the Siegfried line. Though in reality nowhere near as strong as the French believed, or pretended to believe, the Westwall looked to the hesitant French military leadership of the time like an insurmountable obstacle, or one which could be broken into only at the cost of casualty levels that the country could not afford. Even in 1936, long before the construction of fortification in the Rhineland, the French

^a The British did make sure that Poland's gold would be safe from German seizure; something they had failed to do in the case of Czechoslovakia.

Commander-in-Chief, General Maurice Gamelin, had believed that the French army could not break through the Rhineland;⁵⁸ he could hardly be more optimistic now. Any questioning of the efficacy of the Westwall would have implied questioning the strength of France's own elaborate defensive fortification system, the Maginot Line, and no one was prepared to make the mental effort and face the political and military implication of such dangerous thoughts.⁵⁹ And with a military doctrine which dispersed the French armored forces as supporting elements among the infantry units, there was perhaps some truth to the view that, if the French army did move after it had completed mobilization, there would in any case not have been time for its slow advance to make itself felt before the bulk of the German army could be returned to the Western Front from its victory in Poland. Even without such thoughts, however speculative, the French military leaders saw the prospect of victory *not* in an early offensive but in a successful defensive, followed only after lengthy preparation by an offensive of their own. That was how they had won in 1918; it was their only recipe for victory in the future.

In spite of this defensive military policy, which in effect wrote off any smaller Eastern allies of France, to be overrun before an offensive was mounted against Germany, the French in negotiations with the Polish Minister of War in May 1939 had promised a major offensive in the West at the latest on the fifteenth day of mobilization, after they had started bombing Germany immediately on the outbreak of war and begun limited local offensives on the third day after announcing mobilization.⁶⁰ The origins and purposes of this deception remain to be explained, but all available evidence shows that there was never any intention of implementing the central portion of these promises—a major offensive starting on the fifteenth day of mobilization—and the man who would have had to command it, General Alphonse Georges, in fact asserted that he would resign if ordered to carry it out.⁶¹

The French military would wait for the buildup of a substantial British army, a process guaranteed to last a year or two, and would hope that the increasing strength of the Western Allies might induce the Belgians to side with them and permit an eventual invasion of Germany across their territory, an even more remote contingency. The meaning of such a policy, whatever explanations for it were offered later, was that only nominal French actions in the West would occur while Poland was overrun. The focus of concern was a successful defense of France against a German offensive, whenever it came.

That left the possibility of using the British and French air forces to bomb Germany; but here too there were doubts in both governments,

doubts which reinforced each other. As Nicholas Bethell has put it, "Both sides were relieved by the other's reluctance to act."⁶² In spite of the obvious and public evidence of German bombing of civilian targets in Poland, the British and French both still insisted on restraining their air forces by strict limitation in target selection to the purely military.^a Furthermore, there was great concern that an air offensive might simply lead to extensive German retaliatory raids, which neither the British nor the French believed themselves prepared to meet.⁶³ The British plans for bombing German industrial targets in the Ruhr area were met not only by concern over civilian casualties which would inevitably result, but by French fears for their own industry, still without adequate defense. As for the French air force, it was neither prepared for nor inclined to offensive operations of any kind; it would merely support the ground operations of French forces—and of these, as we have seen, none were under way.⁶⁴ Aside from unsuccessful attempts to attack German warships from the air⁶⁵—the purely military target for bombers by its very nature—the air effort over Germany in the first months of war illuminated the political perceptions rather than the military intentions of the Allies. British planes dropped millions of leaflets over Germany explaining the causes of the war and calling on the German people to end it. Unwilling or unable to believe that a population assumed to be cultured and civilized could support its government in the terrible course Germany had undertaken, the Allies still hoped that an internal upheaval might end the conflict. This assumption confused Germany's enemies for a long time, and only the endlessly dedicated support Hitler received from the country eventually dispelled illusions which did credit to the sentiments if not to the insight of those who held them.⁶⁶

Other than in Poland itself, the war began in earnest in September 1939 only at sea. Two German pocket-battleships and sixteen submarines had been sent into the Atlantic before the German initiation of hostilities so that they might begin to attack Allied shipping immediately. When war started, the German naval construction program had to be curtailed for the time being; the big battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* as well as the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* were to be completed, and work was also continued on one of the two aircraft carriers; but work on the super-battleships which were designed to provide Germany with a major

^a The record of the extended discussion of this subject in the British Cabinet meeting of October 14, 1939, is highly instructive. There were still to be restraints on bombing because of concern over civilian casualties. The Germans were to be left the dubious honor of starting with the bombing of cities (in the face of evidence that they had already done so in Poland), but the British would do the same if the Germans began general bombing or invaded neutral Belgium. War Cabinet 47(39), PRO, CAB 65/3, ff. 123–27.

surface fleet had to be postponed for the time being.^a Available resources, insofar as they were allocated to the navy at all, were concentrated on submarines, destroyers, and smaller warships.

After a brief initial period of restraint to see whether the Western Powers, and especially France, were seriously going to become involved in military activities against Germany, the German navy began its attack on Allied shipping.⁶⁷ Even in the cautious first days, the liner *Athenia* was sunk with large loss of life; but the German government, which preferred to postpone war with the United States, pretended that this sinking was a British provocation; and Admiral Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the navy, was careful to maintain this fiction after talking to the captain of the German submarine which had fired the torpedo.⁶⁸ With mines laid off the British coast, submarines in the waters around Great Britain, the pocket-battleships in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and a little later auxiliary cruisers disguised as merchant ships, the Germans did what they could to interrupt Allied shipping. They also tried to support these efforts by using their only two then available battleships for diversionary operations closer to home. The penetration of the great British naval base at Scapa Flow and the sinking of the battleship *Royal Oak* by a German submarine (U-47) on October 14, 1939, was a serious blow for the British but certainly could not balance the uneven strength in capital ships.

The German efforts did indeed have a substantial impact with the sinking of several hundred thousand tons of Allied shipping, but on balance it must be noted that the greater strength of the Allies at sea gave them an advantage the Germans could not yet overcome. The convoy system for protecting Allied shipping was initiated on the most threatened routes almost immediately—instead of after great delay as in World War I—and reduced losses. One of the pocket-battleships was forced into naval action off the coast of Argentina and Uruguay and subsequently scuttled by the Germans themselves. Although a substantial portion of the crew of the *Graf Spee* eventually returned to Germany with the assistance of the Soviet Union,⁶⁹ the morale effect in both Britain and Germany of the spectacular developments surrounding what was called the “Battle of the River Plate” was clearly in favor of the

^a Admiral Raeder thought that England had gone to war in 1939 for fear of a deteriorating naval situation later when the German navy had completed its construction program. (“Gedanken des Oberbefehlshabers der Kriegsmarine zum Kriegsausbruch 3.9.1939,” 3 September 1939, BA/MA, RM 6/71.) Like most German, but unlike most Japanese, naval officers, Raeder considered only Germany’s construction plans and their implementation while ignoring the naval construction programs of other powers. This curious form of blindness—there is no reference to the fact that Great Britain and the United States had begun substantial naval building programs in the 1930s and that the ships being built would some day be completed—awaits investigation.

Allies.⁷⁰ Not as obvious to the public, but perhaps more significant in the long run, was the way in which confusion over strategy and organization in the German navy produced the sacking of first one fleet commander and subsequently his successor by Raeder.⁷¹

Three critical aspects of the war at sea which would remain characteristic features of the whole struggle were already becoming evident in the first months of the war. The first was the fact that the British navy had greatly underestimated the extent to which German submarines could operate successfully against Allied shipping, in spite of techniques of anti-submarine warfare developed during World War I, so that the small number of German submarines at sea in the first year of the war could have a major impact. In this, the Germans were aided by the fact that they had developed a submarine type which operated effectively in the Atlantic in spite of its relatively slow speed, its need to spend as much time as possible on the surface, and the use of a torpedo model which well into the war was as likely to malfunction as to explode as it was supposed to.⁷² Far into the war, in fact until mid-1943, the German navy was also assisted in its attacks on Allied shipping by information derived from broken British codes, at first less important ones, but in 1940-43 the Royal Navy Code 3 used for the convoys.⁷³

On the other hand, unknown to the Germans, the British, using the basic information supplied by Polish cryptologists, were beginning to work on the German naval codes as well as on improving their radio direction finders. The Commander-in-Chief of the German navy, Admiral Raeder, on January 23, 1940, warned Admiral Dönitz, the commander of German submarines, about restricting the use of radios by submarines to reduce the danger from radio locators, but the latter could see no great danger—on this issue he would remain stubbornly ignorant until after Germany's defeat.⁷⁴

A second element of the conflict at sea was the restriction imposed on the Germans by the absence of any effective naval air arm. This is a long and complicated story, the origins of which are even now not entirely clear, but the key fact was that the German navy never had its own air reconnaissance system and had to depend on the very intermittent and eventually non-existent willingness or ability of the German air force to provide such support. In practice, this meant that German submarines had to find the convoys themselves, by no means an easy task and one that would subsequently lead them into great difficulties.

The third factor evident in the first months of naval war was the extraordinary willingness of British naval ships to run whatever risks seemed appropriate to fight it out regardless of losses in specific engagements. They were spared the disaster which would surely have followed

had the pet project of Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty been implemented in the fall of 1939. As yet unaware of the danger of sending surface warships into seas dominated by enemy air forces, he was urging that British navy units move into the Baltic Sea in the face of German control of the skies there.⁷⁵ When it came to actions in reality, as opposed to imagination, however, the Royal Navy showed daring and skill. The destruction of the *Graf Spee* by British cruisers she outclassed was only the first spectacular instance. Another would follow soon after, and one closely related to that example.

The *Graf Spee* while busy sinking ships had been supplied by a German naval auxiliary, the *Altmark* (which had been sent out for this purpose as early as August 5, 1939)⁷⁶ and to which she transferred the crews captured from those ships. The *Altmark* was then to take these as prisoners back to Germany. While illegally taking her prisoners through Norwegian waters, the *Altmark* was boarded by a British destroyer which freed the 300 prisoners on February 16, 1940, while allowing the ship itself to continue.⁷⁷ The Royal Navy had not lost its spirit, as many subsequent events confirmed.⁷⁸

If protection of Allied shipping against German submarines and surface ships was the major defensive function of Allied naval power, its offensive role was its participation in the blockade of Germany. The mythology of World War I included belief in the efficacy of the blockade as a decisive weapon in the Allied success against the Central Powers. Scholarship questioning this view did not appear until long after World War II; and in the pre-war years the British government assumed that blockade would again become a major element in the Allied arsenal in any new war against Germany. In the event, the measures initiated in 1939 and strengthened in the following years did have some effect on Germany, but their impact was greatly reduced by the availability of supplies provided by or across the Soviet Union until June 1941, by the German conquest of Western Europe from the spring of 1940 on, by pre-war German stockpiling of critical supplies, and by changes in German industrial procedures which reduced dependence on imported raw materials. First British and later United States purchases of scarce materials in neutral countries, especially Spain, Portugal and Turkey, had their effect, primarily in the last year of World War II, but there is no evidence to suggest that the measures of what was termed "economic warfare" actually played a major role in Allied victory.⁷⁹

It was in fact as a part of their effort to throttle the German war economy that the British and French governments in the winter of 1939–40 gave serious consideration to the occupation of Sweden and aerial bombardment of the Caucasus oil fields during the Russo-Finnish War.

Some aspects of this will be discussed in connection with the review of that conflict, but it should be noted here that the root of these projects was to be found in the hope of depriving Germany of iron ore from Sweden and oil from the Soviet Union. In the case of the former, the massive shipments of high-grade ores to Germany were believed then and continued to be thought later to be essential to Germany's armaments industry. Recent research has shown these calculations to have been somewhat exaggerated—Germany had alternatives available to her—but at the time it was widely believed that an Allied occupation of the key mines in northern Sweden, attendant on the sending of assistance to Finland in her defense against Soviet invasion, would have the effect of crippling armaments production in the Third Reich.⁸⁰

Similarly, bombing Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus, especially those at Baku, was seen as a way of making it impossible for the Soviet Union to provide Germany with the oil supplies so important to her war effort. Pushed very heavily by the French government, this project was delayed and eventually turned down by the British government which saw it as certain to bring a war with Russia but unlikely to end either the war with Germany or the newly initiated one against the Soviet Union. Both this and the Scandinavian project reveal more about the anxiety of the French government to transfer hostilities from Western Europe to practically anywhere else on the globe with little attention to the likely implications and about the greater realism of the British leaders of the time, especially Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, than about any real prospects of defeating Germany by measures in the economic field.⁸¹

THE NEUTRALS

If these were the initial moves of the major belligerents, how did the new war look to other powers? Italy had allied herself formally with Germany in May of 1939 by treaty.⁸² Her understanding had, however, been that several more years of peace would precede the joint war against France and Britain for which the "Pact of Steel" was designed. Moving forward at his own speed rather than Rome's, Hitler had disregarded the warnings from Italy and had plunged into war. The Italians had not only stood aside but had tipped off the Western Powers of their intention to do so. They had been angry with the Germans for disregarding what they perceived as Italy's need for additional preparation, and had been alarmed at the possibility that if they joined in they would be exposed to defeats from French and British attacks launched against them while Germany concentrated her forces on Poland. They saw themselves

exposed in 1939 to the fate which had befallen Austria–Hungary in 1914 when Russian armies destroyed the cream of the Dual Monarchy’s forces in Galicia while Germany concentrated on what was supposed to be a quick victory over France. Italy’s Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, was especially annoyed with the Germans and reinforced as much as he could the inclination of Mussolini to refrain from entering the war on Germany’s side. The Italian fear of an Allied attack on them was by no means unwarranted. The vulnerability of Italy was as obvious to London and Paris as it was to Rome—all three overestimating Italian strength about equally—but the Western Powers were not about to take advantage of their superiority by attacking a neutral Italy.⁸³

For a short time in late September the Italians thought that perhaps the Germans could be persuaded to give up a large portion of the Polish territory they had occupied, make peace with a Polish government, and thus restore something akin to the situation preceding the outbreak of war. That, in turn, might have provided the Italian government the year of peace they wanted to prepare themselves for war with the Western Powers. Count Ciano learned very quickly, however, during his visit to Germany on October 1st that the Germans were under no circumstances going to give up anything. Hitler became as hysterical over suggestions of restoring an independent Poland when urged in that direction by Ciano as he rejected all ideas of a revived Czechoslovakia. Hitler explained that he did not expect peace with the West—a subject to which we will return—but was prepared to fight to victory. Rejoicing in his victory and his fine relations with the Soviet Union, he was not about to draw back.⁸⁴

Mussolini also toyed briefly with the idea of organizing a Balkan bloc to mediate peace, but quickly drew back as it became clear that this might separate him permanently from Germany. His basic policy was and remained an alignment with Hitler and entrance into the war as soon as possible. He could see no alternative way for Italy to attain the imperial ambitions he craved for her. If the Allies won—as he sometimes feared and as Ciano expected—they would hem in Italy’s position permanently. If Germany won without Italian help, Italy would not only get nothing for herself but could in fact end up under German domination, something Mussolini feared. Whatever the hopes and fears of Ciano or the Italian military, the Vatican or the royal family, to say nothing of the Italian population, Mussolini would steer a course toward war. Only the details of timing and intervening issues of the day-to-day conduct of government remained to be settled.⁸⁵

The Italian government during the period of “non-belligerence,” as they called it in preference to the pacific sounding term “neutrality,”

cooperated minimally with the Germans in the economic sphere. Here the Italians were in a quandary. The very preparation they wanted to make for war with the West entailed imports which might be made subject to blockade. Simultaneously, the Germans alone would and could supply the coal Italy needed, a hold on Italy reinforced by Germany's conquest of Poland's coal mines which had been supplying Italy since the British General Strike of 1926 had interrupted coal shipments from Britain. Whatever the details and the arguments over shipments, purchases, and blockade measures, the basic position of Mussolini never changed.⁸⁶

The same thing was true of the continuing troubles over the long-promised evacuation of Germans from the South Tyrol. The Italians repeatedly and pointedly contrasted the rapidity and apparent smoothness with which German people were evacuated from the Baltic States and other areas coming under Soviet control with the interminable delay in moving Germans out of the South Tyrol.⁸⁷ But while they complained and fretted, they could never see themselves breaking over this issue with the Germans, who shrewdly pointed out to them that it was in part to provide settlement space for these very people that she could not abandon her schemes for massive population shifts in Poland. And the Italians themselves, or at least the authorities on the spot, were by no means certain that any massive emigration of the sort the German government was planning, as a part of its population transfer program, would be such a wonderful thing for them: who would cultivate the alpine farms abandoned by those who left for Germany?

There were plenty of occasions for friction since Italians and Germans heartily disliked one another, and this gave rise to any number of incidents, including a German-deciphered warning by the Italians to Holland and Belgium that they were about to be invaded.⁸⁸ All the same, Mussolini would not break with Hitler, Hitler would not break with Mussolini, and no person or group in either country could force a major shift in policy.⁸⁹

Mussolini was especially concerned about the possibility that the Soviet Union might displace Italy as Germany's most important ally and did what he could to deflect what he perceived to be a real danger to Italy's position in a Europe in which Germany would, in his judgement, always be the most powerful country. This was the underlying reason for his willingness to tolerate and even share in Ciano's use of the opportunity provided by the Russo-Finnish war to endanger Italian-Soviet relations which had generally been excellent since the early 1920s.⁹⁰ The Germans did their best to patch up the quarrel between their old and their new-found friend,⁹¹ but Mussolini need not have worried; Hitler had no intention of letting his satisfaction over Soviet support in the current war against the Western Powers interfere with

his long-term aims for expansion in the East. On the very day that the Soviet-Finnish war was ending, Mussolini would commit himself to entering the war against Britain and France on Germany's side.

The other European power closely aligned with Germany, Spain, had made no secret of its interest in remaining outside the war, at least for the time being. The civil war there had ended with the triumph of Francisco Franco's Nationalists only a few months earlier, and the country was in no condition to undertake any great adventures. Not only was a period of reconstruction after three years of warfare necessary, but Spain was dependent upon imports of food and petroleum products, with both subject to interruption by Allied blockade. The economic needs of Spain, in fact, led to important trade agreements with France in January and with England in March of 1940. The Germans were not only obviously unable to provide Spain with any goods the latter needed; but their insistence in the months between the end of the civil war and the beginning of World War II on repayment by Spain for the aid provided during the fighting soured opinion in government circles in Madrid.⁹² And certainly the Spanish dictator, who had just been urged most insistently by Berlin to join the Anti-Comintern Pact,⁹³ was not enthused by Germany's signing up with the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ Nevertheless the Spanish government thought of itself as favoring Germany and was, as will be shown, willing to assist the German war effort. In the long run, there was always the hope that a German victory might bring the return of Gibraltar to Spanish control.⁹⁵

The German government was not surprised by Spain's neutrality in 1939. They had been angered by Franco's early announcement of neutrality in 1938, but they expected nothing else this time. Already in January 1939 Hitler had explained to Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels that Spain could do no more than remain neutral.⁹⁶ The Germans had, however, long been planning to use neutral Spanish and other territory for their naval war against the Western Powers. The German navy had taken preliminary steps in this direction already in 1938; in January 1939 they drew lessons for the future.⁹⁷ A study of this subject remains to be written; understandably the Germans—and presumably the Spaniards—did not leave massive records of these clandestine activities, but enough has already come to light to provide some sense of what was going on.⁹⁸ From the beginning of the war into its last days, the Germans maintained a massive intelligence operation inside Spain, often with Spain's assistance. In addition to using this, especially to observe traffic through the Straits of Gibraltar, the Germans relied on Spanish harbors to repair and refuel their submarines. This had been a key part of their pre-war plans for "using" Spain's neutrality, and it would long be an important

feature of the German conduct of submarine warfare. If usually not as publicly conspicuous as presented in the movie, "Das Boot," it was still a highly effective way for the Spanish government to show where its real sympathies lay.⁹⁹

A number of other European neutrals were of particular importance to Germany. Sweden, as already mentioned, provided the German economy with a substantial proportion of her high-grade iron ore. In spite of German efforts to exploit her domestic ores, especially through the new works of the Four-Year Plan, Germany imported enormous quantities of ores from Sweden, which in 1939 and 1940 provided 40 percent of her total iron supply (measured by Fe content).¹⁰⁰ Although the proportions dropped thereafter to about 25 percent because of German conquests in Western and Eastern Europe, the contribution of Swedish ores to a central segment of Germany's war economy is obvious. In recent years there has been a controversy in the scholarly literature about the extent to which Germany could or could not have managed without these imports from Sweden, an argument revolving around the provocatively formulated question: "Could Sweden have stopped the Second World War?" and eventually answered with a qualified "no" on the grounds that the German economy had other reserves and possible alternatives.¹⁰¹

Whatever the final judgement on this question, there was no doubt in anybody's mind at the time. The Germans believed the supplies were essential to them; the Swedes were entirely willing to sell Germany what she wanted;¹⁰² the Germans could never be certain whether or not the Swedes would blow up the mines if Germany tried to seize them;¹⁰³ and the Allies always considered the ore supplies from Sweden an essential element in the German war effort. The enormous contribution Sweden thereby made to Germany's industry was heightened by two further aspects of these deliveries; the ores were of very high iron content and hence required far less processing effort and material than any alternative ores, and the Swedish merchant marine provided delivery service to German ports.¹⁰⁴

From the beginning of the war, therefore, the German government was interested in maximum exploitation of the Swedish economy for her own purposes and could always postpone the risk of Sweden's destroying the mines until the Third Reich had attained its anticipated victory and could then terminate the independence of Sweden without having to worry.¹⁰⁵ In the interim, the Swedes could make lots of money and the German government would, when appropriate, be careful of Swedish susceptibilities.¹⁰⁶ After the conquest of Norway and Denmark, the Germans would feel able to pressure Sweden into

greater concessions, but to begin with all they wanted was the iron needed for their war effort.¹⁰⁷

If Sweden had been providing much of Germany's iron ore, Turkey was important to Germany for its deliveries of chrome. The complicated diplomatic negotiations of Turkey with Germany, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France in the summer and fall of 1939 had eventually led to an alliance of Turkey with the Western Powers on October 19, 1939. The combined pressure of Germany and the Soviet Union on Ankara had not succeeded in preventing this Turkish step; in fact, their cooperation looked especially dangerous to the Turks, who had previously counted on Soviet support against Germany's Balkan ambitions. As long as Turkey could believe in the strength of the Western Powers, she could allow a situation in the economic sphere to continue in which the absence of agreement with Germany meant no chrome deliveries by Turkey and no arms delivered by Germany. For a while Britain regained her economic position in Turkey, which also looked more kindly upon a France which had just ceded a piece of the mandate of Syria to her.¹⁰⁸ The German victory in the West in the spring of 1940 would open a new chapter in Turkey's position in the war. She had remained neutral up to that point; the price of neutrality would change thereafter.¹⁰⁹

Economically important to the German war effort in Southeast Europe were the countries of Yugoslavia and, even more, Romania. Yugoslavia was potentially a major supplier of copper; Romania of oil. Both countries preferred to remain neutral and tried to resist German pressure; both made some concessions. In the case of Yugoslavia, as long as France was still considered strong and Italy remained neutral, the government in Belgrade could maintain a degree of independence. It promised to send some copper to Germany in exchange for arms deliveries promised by Germany earlier but not yet supplied and now deliberately held up. Pushed by both sides of the developing conflict, the government, led by the Regent Prince Paul, certainly preferred a victory by Britain and France but was reluctant to defy Germany, tried to use the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations with the Soviet Union as a counterweight, and made some concessions on trade. It was made known, however, that Yugoslavia would fight if attacked, and Belgrade encouraged the French and British to open a Balkan front against Germany by landing forces at Salonika as they had done in World War I. Nothing came of these projects; the main worry in Belgrade continued to be the likelihood of an attack by Italy.¹¹⁰

For all the belligerents, Romania was of enormous importance because it was, after the Soviet Union, the major petroleum producing

country in Europe. The Germans had been trying hard for some time to secure as large a proportion of Romania's oil exports for themselves as possible while the British and French, whose nationals owned a large stake in the Romanian oil industry, had begun to fight back. In the fall of 1939 and the following winter this silent struggle over Romania's oil went forward, complicated by Soviet, Hungarian, and Bulgarian territorial ambitions on portions of Romania's territory and Britain's (unsuccessful) efforts to sabotage the oil fields as well as the transportation system used to deliver oil to Germany.

As long as the situation in Western Europe remained essentially unchanged, the Romanians could get by with minimal trade concessions to the Germans, designed in part to reduce German complaints about Romania's allowing numerous Poles to flee into and eventually across her territory.¹¹¹ They would trade some oil for weapons; they would allow the Western Powers to use their ownership powers in the oil fields to restrict exports to Germany; and they could hold on to their territory because the Soviet Union became embroiled elsewhere—as a result of its attack on Finland—while Hungary and Bulgaria were restrained by fear of becoming involved in the war. Once France was defeated, all this would change.¹¹²

Outside Europe, the most important powers in 1939 were undoubtedly Japan and the United States. Japan was at the time already deeply involved in hostilities with China. After seizing the northern provinces of that country in 1931 and organizing them into the puppet state of Manchukuo, Japan had tried to protect its rich loot and to expand its influence in China by a series of interventions, particularly in the rest of northern China. These steps had not surprisingly produced a rising tide of anti-Japanese sentiments in China, which in turn led the Japanese to embroil themselves even more deeply into Chinese affairs. When this tendency to interfere in China was combined with a degree of internal confusion and incoherence within the Japanese government that made the Chinese warlords of the time look well organized, new trouble was almost certain to follow.

An incident near the Liukiachow Bridge at Peking in July 1937 became the occasion for hostilities between steadily increasing Japanese forces and the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek. Although the Japanese built up their forces in China slowly and the Nationalists—in part trained by German officers—fought hard, the Chinese were unable to hold the Japanese back. Sometimes with the approval of all the authorities in Tokyo and sometimes without, the Japanese army pushed forward. Various efforts to mediate the conflict failed. The most promising of these, that by Germany, which preferred for her East Asian friends

to confront the Western Powers rather than each other, foundered on the steadily escalating demands of the Japanese and the insistence on these demands by the civilians in Tokyo, led by Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, when for once the Japanese military were more agreeable to a settlement.¹¹³

The war between Japan and China ground on. Ever larger forces were committed by the Japanese who also tried hard and violently to end all Western influence in and support of China. As the war continued, the Japanese conquest of much of China weakened the Nationalist government and provided the Chinese Communists with a great opportunity to increase their influence.¹¹⁴ The authorities in Tokyo, however, had their attention focused on the Nationalists. They tried to end their war with the latter by a variety of generally self-contradictory policies. They periodically mounted new military offensives; they at times tried to negotiate with Chiang through various intermediaries; they hoped to pressure other countries into cutting off any supplies to the Nationalists; and they attempted to split the Nationalists by creating an alternative Nationalist regime under Wang Ching-wei, a defector from Chiang's movement who had occupied prominent positions in the Nationalist Party.

The Japanese military advances were far too limited to accomplish the intended purpose. It was not until 1944 that, as will be discussed subsequently, the Japanese launched offensives that were comprehensive enough to crush Chiang's armies—but by that time only the Chinese Communists could benefit since Japan was being defeated by the United States. The soundings for a compromise of some sort with Chiang, of which the first began in November 1939, were never carried forward with any real coherence.¹¹⁵ A comprehensive study of them remains to be written,¹¹⁶ but their only real effect was to strengthen Chiang's hand in extorting aid from the United States by always projecting the possibility of an accommodation with Japan as an available alternative to the policy of continued resistance.

The Japanese hopes of obliging Chiang to give in by cutting off his foreign sources of supply were first implemented by seizure of most Chinese ports. Pressure on France to restrict use of the railway crossing northern French Indo-China into China, what was known as the Yunnan railway, came next. Later on, the territory that railway crossed would itself be occupied by Japanese troops and there would be pressure on the British to close the road which ran from the end of the railway at Lashio in northern Burma (and the Irrawaddy river at Bhamo) to Chungking, the Nationalist capital. The other route across which supplies reached the Nationalists was a long land route, which ran from the

Soviet Turk-Sib railway at and north of Alma Ata in Central Asia across Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia to Chungking, a distance of over 3000 miles, but of enormous symbolic if not equivalent practical importance.¹¹⁷ The Japanese government, which saw this supply route as both substantially and psychologically very important for the Nationalists, periodically tried to include its closing as an aspect of improved Japanese-Soviet relations whenever they pursued that line of policy.¹¹⁸

Finally, they hoped either to arrange a substitute for Chiang or to frighten him into agreement by establishing a new government for China under Wang Ching-wei. This project the Japanese themselves undermined by imposing on Wang conditions so onerous as to make him an obvious puppet of Japan rather than a credible alternative to Chiang.¹¹⁹

At the time Germany began the war in Europe, the Japanese were in the last stages of being defeated by the Soviet Union in bitter and bloody fighting on the border of Manchuria and Outer Mongolia in what was called the Nomonhan (Khalkhin-gol) Incident.¹²⁰ This fighting and its settlement by an armistice on September 15 has already been discussed in the context of Soviet policy; what needs to be stressed here are some ramifications of this crushing defeat for Japanese policy then and in the following years. It made some within the Japanese military yearn for revenge, but it led many of them to rethink their plans for the future.¹²¹ The Soviet Union was clearly a formidable power, and now that it was relieved by agreement with Germany of any immediate danger in Europe, all the more able to develop its military potential in East Asia. This suggested to many in Tokyo that a reorientation of Japanese policy might well be desirable. The navy had long looked southwards rather than northwards for expansion; the army now began to do an about face as well. The Japanese would protest formally—and rather sheepishly—against Germany's violation of the secret protocol to the Anti-Comintern Pact by signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact,¹²² but the new policy being developed in Tokyo could draw a benefit from the surprising turn of events. Since Germany now had such good relations with Moscow, she could assist Japan in improving relations with the Soviet Union.¹²³ A Japanese-Soviet rapprochement might conceivably be used to put pressure on Nationalist China, but it would in any case facilitate a Japanese move southward.^a This meant potentially a clash with the Western Powers, and since the Germans had long been urging precisely such a course on Tokyo, the Japanese could feel confident of German support.

^a The Japanese government formally adopted a policy line calling for a settlement of outstanding issues with the Soviet Union and possibly a non-aggression pact on December 28, 1939; see Hosoya in James W. Morley (ed.), *Fateful Choice* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 27-8, 36-7.

And although on occasion Hitler would self-righteously explain that Germany could crush Britain all by herself, on most occasions then and until December 1941 he urged Japan to attack southwards, particularly against Great Britain, which he saw as Germany's most dangerous and determined enemy.¹²⁴

Such a course, however, meant for the Japanese the real possibility of a clash with the United States and for this they did not consider themselves ready. The Japanese navy had long contemplated the possibility of war with the United States and developed plans for such a contingency.¹²⁵ The construction program of the Japanese navy was geared to this contingency; in fact the huge super-battleships planned since the fall of 1934 were specifically designed to outclass American ships and, once they had appeared in action, confront the United States government with the dilemma of building equal ships, which would be too wide to pass through the Panama Canal and would be restricted to one ocean, or to continue building inferior ships.¹²⁶ But the advocates of moving forward were not yet in control in Japan.¹²⁷ The new government of Abe Nobuyuki insisted on neutrality in the European war and held to that line until its fall in January 1940; but, as the most careful recent analysis of this period shows, no really pro-Western course could be followed.¹²⁸ Approaches were made to the United States primarily because she had given the required notice in July 1939 that the Japanese-American trade agreement would lapse. The hope in Washington had been that such a step, by which the commercial treaty would expire in late January 1940, might restrain Japan.¹²⁹ The United States' policy of limited aid to China, particularly in the financial field, was clearly designed for the same purpose, as well as to make it more difficult for Japan to obtain complete control of China and then turn her attention in other directions.¹³⁰ Minimal Japanese gestures toward the United States in the fall of 1939 indicate that this was not an entirely hopeless idea; but because continued advance in China remained basic to Japanese policy—and it was precisely on this point that the United States expected at least some concessions from Tokyo—nothing came of these efforts.¹³¹

The Japanese had some quite realistic views on such subjects as Soviet strength and the likelihood of the European war lasting for several years.¹³² They were, furthermore, not prepared to cut off their ties with the Polish government and maintained diplomatic relations with it.¹³³ They would for a while be very cautious in their economic dealings with Germany; in fact, they were quite willing to take advantage of the Third Reich's desperate need for soybeans from Manchuria to drive a hard bargain.¹³⁴ Such tactics would continually introduce friction into

German-Japanese relations throughout the war. In the early part of the conflict, there were particularly aggravating difficulties as the Japanese refused to help the Germans as much as the latter hoped and expected in arranging for the shipment of rubber and other important goods to the railheads of the Transsiberian railway for dispatch to Germany. The Japanese measures had the effect of reducing the extent to which Germany, with the approval and assistance of the Soviet Union, could benefit from this gap in the blockade.¹³⁵

There were, however, elements in Japan pushing for a vastly more adventurous policy. Led by such individuals as Shiratori Toshio, until the fall of 1939 Japanese ambassador in Rome, they looked forward to a full alliance with Germany, hoping to end the war in China by partitioning it with the Soviet Union (and incidentally turning over to the Soviet Union those districts of China controlled by the Communists), and heading for war with Britain, France, and the United States.¹³⁶ As yet these elements were restrained by others, first in the Abe government and then in that of his successor, Yonai Mitsumasa, but any turn of the war in Europe favoring the Germans would enable them to carry the day.¹³⁷

The United States had played a major part in the outcome of World War I. Its munitions and other supplies had helped the Allies conduct the war; its soldiers and credits had played a key role in halting the final German offensive in the summer of 1918 and in turning the desperate situation of Britain and France of the spring and summer of that year into victory in the fall.¹³⁸ In the same post-war years as more and more Germans convinced themselves that they had been defeated by a stab in the back, with America's role in deciding the issue of war being a legend, increasing numbers of Americans became persuaded that entry into the conflict had been a terrible mistake. German belief in the stab-in-the-back legend—with its implication for underrating the importance of American involvement in the war—would lead to a grotesque underestimation of United States military potential, a subject which will be reexamined repeatedly.¹³⁹ The Americans, on the other hand, had tried to insulate themselves against war by neutrality legislation.

When World War II began in September 1939, those who had urged American support of the peace settlement of 1919, and, in particular, believed that the United States should join the League of Nations, could now point to the accuracy of their prophecies that only a full share in the maintenance of world order could prevent another war. Their advice had been ignored—and here was the second world war within a generation. This argument, that American abstention from an active role in maintaining the peace settlement of 1919 had contributed heavily to making the second war possible, would eventually come to be accepted

by a large proportion of the American electorate and lead them and a majority in both political parties to approve of a very different policy in the post-World War II era. But this acceptance of a "lesson" from the past came slowly and did not become a dominant strain in American thinking for some time.¹⁴⁰

The initial reaction of both the leadership and the public in the United States to the outbreak of war in Europe was essentially similar and uniform. The overwhelming majority blamed Germany for starting the war; the overwhelming majority hoped that Britain and France would win; the overwhelming majority wanted to stay out of the war.¹⁴¹ The near unanimity on these three basic issues did not extend, however, to two other subsidiary but in practice critical matters: the real prospects of the Allies and the policy to be followed by the United States toward them.

There were those in the United States who thought it made no difference who won, but for many, the prospect of the victory of the Allies was not only the preferred but the most likely outcome of the conflict. As German victory in Poland was followed by a quiet winter, more of the public began to doubt the ability of Britain and France to defeat her; and their doubt, not surprisingly, increased with German victories in Scandinavia and the West in the spring of 1940. President Roosevelt's views on this subject appear to have been somewhat different—and in retrospect a great deal more far-sighted—than those of many others. He certainly always hoped for an Allied victory over Germany, but he was very skeptical of Western power. In the years before the war, he had been very conscious of the deficiency in French air power and had attempted to assist her air rearmament.¹⁴² While the weakness of French air power was generally recognized at the time, that of the French army was not perceived by most. It was widely assumed that the army which had played the predominant part among the Allies in World War I, and one of whose marshals had led them to victory in 1918, remained the strongest in the world—and if not the strongest, certainly powerful enough to withstand any attack on France.

There is substantial evidence to show that Roosevelt did not share this optimistic assessment of French military strength. He had regularly read with care the reports of his two ambassadors to France in the 1930s, Jesse I. Strauss and William C. Bullitt. Both had excellent contacts in France, both were clear-sighted observers, and both were extremely dubious about French strength.¹⁴³ The picture they conveyed of a nation divided and diffident, terrified of war and uncertain about the course to follow in the face of its approach, was not always accurate in its details but sound in its general import. The enormous literature on Franklin

Roosevelt as yet contains no studies which systematically examine the evidence on his views of either France or Germany, the two major continental nations whose languages he knew, but one thing seems to be clear. Perhaps because of his own predilection for naval matters he appears never to have been affected by the aura of strength surrounding the French army in the inter-war years. Certainly his warning to Stalin in the summer of 1939, that the Soviet Union would be well advised to align itself with the Western Powers rather than Hitler because a German victory in Western Europe would menace all other nations, implied a perception of German strength and French military weakness and a belief in the possibility of a German victory over France on land, which few shared in the pre-war world. On the other hand, as would become apparent in the terrible crisis of the summer of 1940, President Roosevelt would think it likely that first Britain and subsequently the Soviet Union could hold out when most thought otherwise.

These perceptions of the President must be kept in mind in assessing and understanding the practical steps Roosevelt urged on Congress and the American people. He believed that Nazi Germany and its allies threatened the whole world, including the Western Hemisphere, and he very much hoped to keep the United States out of the war. Unlike Stalin, who believed that the best way to avert war from the Soviet Union was to help the Germans fight the Western Powers, Roosevelt thought that the most likely prospect for continual avoidance of war was to assist Britain and France in defeating Germany. Because he believed, correctly as we now know, that the Western Powers were deficient in weapons of war, he considered the prohibition on the sale of weapons to them in the neutrality laws a bonus for the early rearmament of the aggressors and a major handicap for the Allies. He would, therefore, try again to have the neutrality laws changed.

Roosevelt hoped that this could be done on a non-partisan or bi-partisan basis, and in the initial stages tried to involve the 1936 Republican Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, Alfred Landon and Frank Knox, in the process.¹⁴⁴ In the Congress, however, a bitter debate, largely though not entirely on partisan lines, ensued. The issue divided the country. What came to be a standard pattern over the next two years emerged. On the one side were those who believed that, both to stay out of war and to assist Britain and France, neutrality law revision was in the country's interest. A few took this side because they expected or wanted the United States to join the Allies. Against this position were those, generally called isolationists and later strongly identified with the America First Committee, who believed that the best way to stay out of the war was to do nothing to assist Britain and France or to help them

to help themselves; and some took this side because they thought that it might be just as well if Germany won or at least that it made little difference to the United States if she did so.¹⁴⁵

In the weeks before the outbreak of war, the isolationists had won on the issue of allowing others to buy arms in the United States, when Roosevelt had proposed it as a way of warning Germany that American arsenals would be open to those certain to control the seas if Germany started a war. Now that the Germans had started it, the isolationists lost. After a lengthy and bitter struggle, during which Roosevelt, as he put it, was "walking on eggs,"¹⁴⁶ the Congress approved what had come to be called "cash and carry" early in November; the President signed the bill on November 4.¹⁴⁷

The Germans, who were watching this struggle with great interest,¹⁴⁸ were no more in agreement among themselves than the Americans, only in Germany there was a dictator who decided on policy. The navy could hardly wait to bring the United States into the war by repeating its World War I procedure. On October 10, at the same meeting that he advocated a German seizure of bases in Norway, Admiral Raeder urged on Hitler a completely ruthless submarine campaign to throttle England, if necessary at risk of war with the United States.¹⁴⁹ The head of the navy could see no way for Germany to crush England except to destroy her seaborne commerce, whatever the risk of other complications, a repetition of the German navy leadership's argument of 1916 unaffected by the experience of 1917-18.¹⁵⁰ Though at first sounding agreeable, Hitler in fact set limits to the projects of his naval Commander-in-Chief.

Hitler's view of the United States was based on an assessment that this was a weak country, incapable because of its racial mixture and feeble democratic government of organizing and maintaining strong military forces.¹⁵¹ The antagonism of Americans, both in government and among the public, toward Germany was therefore no cause for worry. Certain that Allied victory in World War I was the result of Germany's having been stabbed in the back by the home front, he was never interested in the American military effort in that conflict or any possible renewal of it. He had long assumed that Germany would have to fight the United States after conquering Eurasia, and he had begun preparations toward that end both in airplane and naval construction.¹⁵² The outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, however, forced a temporary postponement in the program to construct a big navy of huge battleships and numerous other surface ships. Although it is not clear when Hitler learned the facts, the project for building planes which could reach the American east coast was also not going well.

Under these circumstances, Hitler preferred to defer war with the

United States, not because he was greatly worried about that prospect, but because he saw no reason to rush into premature hostilities when he had not completed his blue-water navy, and the navy actually at his disposal did not yet have the number of submarines which might really seal off the British Isles. Nothing that had happened in 1939 changed his basic views of the United States. When he saw the German military attaché to Washington in February 1939, the only topic on which he queried the latter was the alleged Jewish ancestry of President Roosevelt.¹⁵³ He had dismissed Roosevelt's peace appeal of April 1939 with derision; the very fact that in September the United States had proclaimed its neutrality showed what incompetents the Americans were, as, in his judgement, strong and determined nations took sides and acted in wartime.¹⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, Hitler preferred the Soviet Union's policy of assisting Germany while neutral to the Americans' inclination to assist Britain and France while neutral; and it hardly needs to be pointed out that Germany was as eager to have neutrals like the Soviet Union and Spain provide assistance to her as she was to denounce as violations of international law any actions by a neutral that aided her opponents. Such antics, however, shed no light on German policy which was guided by entirely different considerations.

One of the elements in Hitler's low assessment of the United States' military potential was, reasonably enough, the weakness of the American army and the near total absence of any air force. When the war started, there were 190,000 men in the American army with no real divisions, corps, or armies as yet; most of the equipment was of World War I vintage and wearing out.¹⁵⁵ The air force was too small even to provide the Germans with target practice. Roosevelt, whose view of American military potential was informed by an entirely different perspective from Hitler's on the role of the United States in helping the Allies defeat Germany in World War I,¹⁵⁶ had been trying to build up forces since before the war. He had begun the rebuilding of the navy in the 1930s; authorized in 1934, the battleship *North Carolina* was begun in October 1937; additional new battleships as well as other vessels would follow.¹⁵⁷ Although it has been observed quite correctly that the President, who had been the second man in the Navy Department under President Wilson and was an avid sailor and collector of ship models, always kept a special place in his heart for the navy, the major push he actually made in the drive to rearm the country concerned the air.¹⁵⁸ It was his hope after the obvious signs of German unhappiness with the Munich agreement that a massive program of air rearmament might impress the German government in an earlier version of what would later be called "deterrence," somewhat the way the fear of German air superiority—

real or imagined—had cowed Britain and France in the 1938 crisis. Given the near absence of any substantial American military aircraft industry, foreign orders for military planes obviously would be of great help in building up that vital element in any future American armaments program. Finally, Britain and France could not be expected to continue to invest in the American aircraft industry if they were not allowed to purchase its products precisely when they most needed them. Although for domestic political reasons the President never stressed this aspect of neutrality law revision in public, there can be little question that the matter was very much in his mind. Gearing up American military production facilities was going to be a huge task, and any and all help would speed the process.¹⁵⁹

The other area of immediate concern to the administration in Washington was the situation in Central and South America. There was worry about the large German element in several Latin American countries, about German ships—and their crews—stranded by the outbreak of war in Latin American ports, and about the attitude of several of the governments in the area toward Germany and the Western Allies. In Central and South America there was a reciprocal concern. All preferred to stay out of the war, some were also worried about German activities at home, and a few either had or hoped to have better relations, especially trade relations, with Germany. A conference held in Panama beginning on September 23, 1939,¹⁶⁰ affirmed the neutrality of the hemisphere. The most spectacular action of the conference was its unanimous endorsement of a neutral war zone reaching far out into the Atlantic, but perhaps of greater substantive significance was the extent to which the nations of the area were prepared to work together under United States leadership. This novel development was, to some extent, a result of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy toward those countries—vigorously implemented by Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Under Secretary Sumner Welles¹⁶¹—combined with fears of Germany, particularly in countries with substantial minorities of German settlers.¹⁶² Insofar as Germany had established some significant positions for herself in the economic life of several Latin American countries, the beginning of war in 1939 created a new situation: the Latin Americans could neither market their products in Germany nor draw on German industry for imports. In this regard, much would depend upon the length and outcome of the war; in the meantime, the South American countries had to look elsewhere for markets and supplies.¹⁶³

An important issue on which Roosevelt himself changed tactics during the first month of World War II was that of the possibility of a peace settlement between the Western Powers and Germany

after the initial defeat of Poland. Convinced that any such settlement on the heels of a German military triumph could only lead to even greater dangers later, Roosevelt refrained from giving any encouragement to such steps in the fall of 1939.¹⁶⁴ He did not directly discourage several Americans who made private efforts in this direction, but he used those efforts—as he had often done with private persons in the past—to inform himself about the situation in Germany.¹⁶⁵ The British government, in any case, was advised to pay no attention to these busybodies.¹⁶⁶ The President himself was primarily worried that during the period of peace soundings, which are reviewed below, the defeatist views of his ambassador in London, Joseph P. Kennedy, might be mistaken for his own, when in fact he thought of the ambassador as a “pain in the neck.”¹⁶⁷

Early in 1940, the increasingly close cooperation of Germany and the Soviet Union led him to be concerned that the Germans might launch an offensive in the West before France and Great Britain were adequately prepared to resist it and that Germany and the Soviet Union could then be joined by Italy. It was under these circumstances that he authorized Under Secretary of State Welles to make his famous tour of European capitals, a tour which revealed that the positions of the belligerents were irreconcilable, but in no way delayed the German offensive which by that time, as will be discussed, had been postponed for entirely different reasons. This tactical shift on Roosevelt's part, however, marked no change in his basic views or in American policy; and as the brief review of the peace soundings of the winter 1939–40 will show, there were in reality no prospects of peace anyway.¹⁶⁸

PEACE SOUNDINGS

Since Hitler had wanted to clear his eastern border preparatory to launching the great German offensive in the West, which he saw as the necessary prerequisite for a vast but easy seizure of living space in the East, he would have been quite happy to have Britain and France acquiesce in the conquest of Poland peacefully and await their turn to be attacked. The Commander-in-Chief of the German air force, Hermann Göring, was also in charge of large segments of the German economy. He wanted more time for economic preparations he considered important and was similarly interested in a respite in open hostilities. In view of these perceptions and aims, Hitler and Göring launched some peace feelers, Hitler in public, Göring in private. Hitler in speeches pointed to the fate of Poland and explained there was now nothing to fight over.¹⁶⁹ Göring sent out feelers through Birger Dahlerus, the Swedish