

## The Beginnings of the European War

Jim Pederson, Dyed in the Wool History, October 7, 2025 r2

This essay addresses the events leading to the beginning of WWII in the European theatre through the successful defense of Moscow without attempting to build or support any particular narrative of the war. It does address the German invasion of the Rhineland and the Munich Accord, which are commonly cited to justify all “preemptive military actions”, but it equally addresses many other events and decisions that have been largely lost to the west’s collective memory because they don’t support commonly fostered beliefs about the conflict. Specifically in the minds of most Americans we see ourselves as having reluctantly come to the rescue of civilization saving the world for the second time in less than half a century. World War II didn’t start out as a World War but as a series of small and short regional wars and could have been stopped at many points before it became a World War and even in that context was fought principally on two fronts or regions.

In assessing the relative contributions of different countries in causing the war and bringing it to a conclusion it is important to keep in mind the enormity of the losses incurred by Russia. Deaths amounted to well over 13% of their total population and potentially significantly higher, depending on who is counted and the method used, compared to app. 500K Americans who perished. Over 75% of German losses occurred on the Eastern front largely before the United States entered the war. The German civilian population also suffered greatly in the later phases of the war.

## Versailles, Government Debt, and the Illusion of Victory

The events leading to the Second World War were complex and have to a significant degree been obscured by the way they have been presented in the educational system and in the media. This is the danger of seeing history through the lens of political philosophy. In the “west” the image of western liberal democracies defeating a German tyrant bent on world domination and then holding the line against the communist menace has been forged into a collective identity created around the war. Those who question any aspect of the “good war” narrative tend to be rapidly attacked by institutional “gatekeepers” as being Hitler (or Stalin) apologists or simply un-American but it is time now after 80 years to try to accurately see WWII as it was through objective historical analysis. There are in many instances lingering uncertainties that can’t be fully resolved and in these cases multiple alternative interpretations will be presented. It’s also important to remember that the people dealing with these events real time lacked the perspective of hindsight and were often if not generally engaging in some sort of political misdirection to deal with both domestic and international enemies. Still many of the decisions remain very difficult to understand or defend.

There’s broad agreement that the events leading to World War II started with Versailles and the terms imposed on Germany. Germany lost one-tenth of her people, one-eighth of her territory including prime food growing land, and all of their overseas empire which was third largest prior to the war (1 pp. 72-

74). The redrawing of the map helped set the stage for the next war in some ways that were obvious and some that were not. It created new client states for France and England in Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia that would be tied to the Morgan-Rothschild financial dynasty and the developing Anglo-American sphere of influence (2). Minority nationalities were forcibly incorporated into these newly drawn or re-drawn nations creating the seeds of unrest and these areas would be central to the events that led up to the start of the general war (2) (3 pp. 102-3). Lloyd George made good on his promise that Germany would be made to pay the full cost of the war including allied military pensions and this was actually a popular position domestically due to the massive losses suffered by England. 26 year old Winston Churchill had told parliament in 1901 that “*Democracy is more vindictive than cabinets,*” and “*The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings*” (4 p. 72). In this he was certainly proven to be right. Fabian Socialist Economist John Maynard Keynes, who was part of the British delegation at Versailles, would return home to write *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* where he observed that the debt burden imposed on Germany would set the stage for a new war (1 p. 75). Finally there was the humiliation of forcing someone to sign a confession of guilt which they wholeheartedly believed to be untrue and had no precedent in the history of Christendom (1 p. 76) (5 p. 218). If these terms were not accepted, Germany faced starvation and death to her people due to the Blockade which had even impounded fishing boats.

It appeared that the British Empire had emerged the strategic victor in the war with the Hohenzollern, Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires all now destroyed and Russia was bordered by newly formed Baltic States that were tied to the west but the cost in “blood and treasure” was very high. The total fatalities suffered by the British Empire were a staggering 921,000 in what was entirely an offensive war (6). Along with vast debt to America and American banks, Britain’s credibility with the American people had suffered greatly especially amongst those who were not inclined to be cultural anglophiles. The British propaganda that had convinced some at least that the, “*Germans were beasts and we must join the good war for a new world where Prussian militarism would never menace mankind again*” (1 p. 114)” no longer resonated. The British substituted the previous Anglo-Japanese alliance that maintained some degree of order in the Far East and constrained Russia, with an Anglo-American alliance. This placed the British and Japanese along with the Russians as regional adversaries in the Far East. Australia and New Zealand, instead of being regional assets became liabilities for a downsized Royal Navy. A Japanese diplomat observed of the new Four-Power Treaty that replaced their previous alliance with Britain that, “*We have discarded whiskey and have accepted water*” (1 p. 116). Balfour was a believer in a trans-Atlantic vision of an Anglo-Saxon union of the two great powers ruling the world and for this; he didn’t get as much as a US commitment for common defense. Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, when presented with this proposal asked with astonishment, “*YOU PROPOSE TO SUBSTITUTE for the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the overwhelming power of the British Navy?*” Royal Navy historian and biographer Arthur Herman described this as an “*act of breathtaking stupidity*” (7 p. 522). The British and the Royal Navy walked away from their long standing doctrine of naval superiority.

During and after WWI private investment became overshadowed by government debts and credit and capital became concentrated in the United States. Prior to WWI claims against foreign assets were held mainly by private investors in the form of equity interests or bonds against income producing assets (8

pp. 40-42). Even large government debts were held mainly by private investors but this was changed by the war resulting in extremely large claims of one government against another. Inter-ally armament debt in 1923 was a staggering \$28 billion which was in turn dwarfed by Germany's reparation bill of \$60 billion. The war in total cost its participants \$209 billion which was from the perspective of the consumer economy unproductive consumption (8 pp. 42-44). Most wars prior to this time had been fought on a subsidy basis with the sponsoring country, most commonly England, paying the military cost of its allies but the scope and duration of the conflict was unique. The US required that the Allies pay the full cost of the war effort, reasoning that the funds had to be raised by issuing bonds that were in effect borrowing from American citizens (8 pp. 41-44) and that the US was not a sponsor but saw themselves as an "associate". As cited in Michael Hudson's *"Super Imperialism"* John Maynard Keynes described government debt and concentration of wealth coming out of WWI as follows:

*"One great change...probably, in the end, a fatal change – has been effected by our governments. During the war individuals threw their little stocks into the national melting pots. Wars have sometimes served to disperse gold, as when Alexander scattered the temple hoards of Persia or Pizarro those of the Incas. But on this occasion war concentrated gold in the vaults of the Central Banks and these banks have not released it."* John Maynard Keynes 1930 (8 p. 41)

In the later stages of the war the Wilson administration had downplayed the issue of war debt and no doubt would have taken a much softer approach to the issue of loans, perhaps forgiving some of it, but the war was never popular with the American public and the US Congress wouldn't approve any such measures. The administration initially tried to go around the Congress with *"Victory Liberty Loans"* acting as if the war was still in progress (8 pp. 48-49). The US economy also had a high degree of dependency on war related purchases from Europe (including agricultural purchases) which threatened an abrupt drop off in demand. The US economy did in fact experience a sharp and deep depression in 1920 but the government and the newly created Federal Reserve did little to address it allowing the bad debt to debar and the economy to re-baseline itself without artificial stimulus which led to a dramatic recovery throughout the 1920's. (2 pp. 49-52)

By 1921 the US established the Foreign War Debt Commission headed by Secretary of the treasury Mellon that effectively determined that the foreign war debts would remain on the books with normal commercial rates applied to them and that no connection would be made between Allied war debts and German reparations (8 pp. 49-52). Britain and France at the time were urging parallel liquidation of inter-Ally debt and German reparations. By not recognizing a link between the two the US government could be moderate in dealing with Germany at no cost to itself. It should be pointed out that German reparations would in effect be paid by Germany producing less than it consumes and sending the difference abroad in the form of exports which would have been at the expense of US producers (8 pp. 49-52). Still the only way the US could receive payback from allied debt was to support German reparation payments and this eventually led to the US government intervening both directly and indirectly through monetary policy.

When French and Belgium troops moved into the Ruhr district over German default on reparation payments in January 1923 it would have crippled German industry and trade with Britain (9 pp. 28-30).

By September, the Germans had agreed to abandon the policies of passive resistance to reparations but economic harm had also been done to the creditor nations which led to the Dawes Plan that restructured the debt enabling Germany to continue reparations and to fund expansion. 55% of these loans came from America (9 p. 30). The Dawes Plan, which was followed by the Young Plan in 1929, stabilized Germany and the international debt structure but during this same period the US expanded its currency base dramatically primarily to support England that created a credit bubble that couldn't be re-inflated (10 pp. 260-75) <sup>1</sup>. After the US stock market crash, the US no longer had the capability to support the Weimer government, reparations were suspended in 1931 (11), and Hitler came into power in 1932. These events, along with the policies of the newly elected Roosevelt administration, then set off a global trade war.

### The Newly Created Baltic States

The three newly created Baltic States are generally seen in the western memory as innocent victims of German and later Russian aggression, but the reality is quite different. These states were aggressive towards each other and their larger neighbors and played a major role in causing the war. Immediately after Versailles, Poland was militarily stronger than Germany and Russia with an army of 30 divisions and 300,000 troops in 1920 while Germany only had 10 divisions and could not match the Poles for many years. Poland invaded Russia in a territorial dispute in 1919 driving the Soviets back to the White River and into Ukraine. By May of 1920 Polish troops overran the Ukraine as far as Kiev. In July the Soviets bounced back and drove the Poles back to the edge of Warsaw but there the Poles won the battle of Warsaw and proceeded to drive the Russians back to Minsk in White Russia effectively wiping out the Red Army. The Russians were forced to make peace giving up claims to "*East Poland*" along with 5 million Ukrainians, 1.2 million White Russians, 1 million Jews, and 1.5 million Poles who lived there (3 pp. 430-1). The war, which ended in the Peace of Riga, expanded Polish territory 250 km into Russian speaking land. During the Polish Russian war the Russians were compelled to recognize an independent Lithuanian state which was then occupied by Poland against the ruling of the League of Nations. This dispute would remain active up to the beginning of WWII. Poland and Czechoslovakia maintained a long standing dispute with each side claiming Upper Silesia which is a multi-ethnic area. In the last week of September 1938 Poland had the army deployed near Teschen and threatened the Czechs with war and the Czechs conceded without a fight causing the now much stronger Soviet Union to temporarily renounce the Polish-Russian non-aggression treaty of 1932 (3 pp. 430-5). Germany and Poland were in constant territorial disputes including an incident in 1921 when the Poles captured East Upper Silesia and attempted to continue their attack to the west but were turned back by volunteers from Germany and Austria with the decisive battle occurring from May 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 1921 (3 pp. 436-8). Each of these conflicts involved complex historical arguments going back hundreds of years.

Poland, along with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, were purposely created as multi-ethnic states but the number of minorities in Poland grew sharply as the result of territorial conquests. By 1923 the population of Poland stood at 30 million people which included 19 million Poles (Polish spoken as

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<sup>1</sup> This is covered in detail in the earlier section on the Federal Reserve and the Great Depression

mother tongue), 5 million Ukrainians <sup>2</sup>, 2.5 million Jews, 2 million Germans, 1.2 million White Russians, and a variety of other smaller groups. Poland had to recognize the rights of these minority populations in the *Minorities Protection Treaty* which was part of the Treaty of Versailles, and also by joining the *“Geneva Convention for the Protection of Minorities”* in 1922 (3 p. 458). None of this, however, was implemented as the Poles went about erasing *“Russification”* and *“Germanization”*. Steps taken to subordinate and remove the minority populations included, expulsions, confiscation of property, prohibition of education in any language other than Polish, revocation of professional licensing (such as medical doctors), incarceration into camps, and wholesale destruction of Orthodox churches. In 1931 the Manchester Guardian described Polish policies saying, *“The minorities in Poland are supposed to disappear... This policy is recklessly pursued, without the slightest attention to public opinion in the world, the international treaties, and the League of Nations. Ukraine under Polish rule has become hell. Of White Russia one can say the same with even greater right. The aim of the Polish policy is the disappearance of national minorities on paper and in reality (3 p. 461)”*. A French-Slavic professor described the takeover of Ukrainian territory as follows: *“There were shootings, hangings, torturing, people were detained, goods seized, in short, they amused themselves just like in the good old days. Many Ukrainian priests were executed.” (3 p. 462)*

The Polish Jews and the *“Jewish question”* was especially problematic. Jews, although having lived in the land of Poland for centuries, lived isolated lives and didn’t see themselves as part of Polish society. In addition to this, there were political and ideological issues as Jews were very commonly affiliated with the Polish Communist Party. Polish Prime Minister Skladkowski estimated in 1937 that 60% of the Polish Jewish population was active communists and 90% of the membership of the Polish Communist Party were Jewish. This same pattern was found in Germany (referred to as *“judischer Bolschewismus”*). From 1933 to 38 over 500,000 Jews fled Poland to seek refuge in Germany (3 p. 463). As Europe moved closer to war, Germany was ruled by a dictator who increasingly violated the rights of ethnic minorities and political dissidents, but so was Poland and Germany’s sins at the time were probably less severe and less long standing than those of Poland. It was a case of near moral equivalency with the only distinguishing factor being that one was acceptable and supported by the western powers and one was not.

Prior to 1930 Poland’s security was built around force superiority but by the early 1930’s this relationship changed. Russia at that point had 80 Army divisions as opposed to Poland’s 35 and both Russia and Germany far exceeded the Poles industrial capacity. For most of this time Russia was occupied in China leading them to accept a non-aggression treaty with Poland that was signed in 1932, renewed in 1934, and running through 1944 (3 p. 471) but the circumstances changed in 1939 with Russia’s victory in Mongolia at Khalkhin-Gol<sup>3</sup>. Still the Polish military remained confident in their ability to defeat Germany in a single front war. Free of a Russian threat, in 1933 the Poles undertook three unsuccessful attempts to persuade France to join in a *“preemptive”* joint offensive war that would target Berlin and East Prussia. *Note: A detailed account of the day by day events that ignited this region is*

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<sup>2</sup> Ukraine is more of a region than a nationality with those in the east starting to identify as a separate group around this time while Russian speakers in the west continued seeing themselves as ethnic Russians.

<sup>3</sup> Mongolia was formed as a modern state out of the remains of China after it collapsed into a failed state ruled by warlords.

*beyond the scope of this essay but there are several books that do provide such a detailed account including Pat Buchanan's "Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War" and Gerd Schultze-Rhonhof's "1939 – The War that had Many Fathers" <sup>4</sup> although they are written from different perspectives and do not necessarily entirely align in their conclusions.*

## German and Russian Strategic Objectives

Following Hitler's rise to power, he bluffed, intimidated, and negotiated his way across Europe re-establishing German territory with the reunification with Austria (Anschluss) in early 1938 being his most significant accomplishment. Throughout the time leading up to the war his arguments fell well within the bounds of normal political discourse and the German proposals were not clearly unreasonable. In fact, if you were a German citizen during this time period it is unlikely that Hitler's dialogue would have seemed extreme or dangerous and his economic policies, based in part on a barter system of international trade, were proving more successful than those of Britain and the US. During the Nuremberg trials Hitler's public speeches were considered mainstream enough that they were not used by the prosecution who based their case(s) principally on the interpretation of speeches given to selective audiences (3). He recognized that western politicians had a sense of guilt about Versailles and was very effective in playing upon it. He was also aided by a fear of Russian communism to the east and the massive land army of the French (1 pp. 164-171). A rearmed Germany was increasingly seen as being necessary to offset other threats and maintain a balance of power. While continually citing the injustices of Versailles, he showed an *"opportunistic willingness to write off German lands and peoples to avoid wars he did not want"* (1 p. 113) to further specific strategic goals which brings us to the topic of what those goals really were.

Through the public education system and the media we have been told and conditioned to believe that Hitler was bent on world domination while Stalin was also a "bad guy" but not bent on world domination at least until after the War ended when he again became an existential threat to world peace. In Mein Kampf Hitler spoke openly about *"breathing room"* (Lebensraum) and *regional hegemony* to the east (1 pp. 130-35) so it should probably be assumed that there was at least a general objective of expanding German territory to the east <sup>5</sup> and uniting all Germanic or German speaking peoples in Europe that was also somewhat negotiable. In Mein Kampf he addresses two primary goals those being (1) economic self sufficiency and freedom from reliance on foreign trade and (2) limited colonial possessions needed to obtain raw materials that are not available in Germany (3 p. 268). By 1940, however, it could also be argued that based on Germany's bi-lateral trading arrangements, the second objective of limited colonial possessions had been overcome by events and was no longer necessary.

As far as world conquest goes, however, Germany didn't have nor seek to develop an open ocean navy that would enable naval assaults or invasions nor bombers. They had agreed to a 35% total tonnage

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<sup>4</sup> 1939 – The War that had Many Fathers provides app. 200 pages of detailed day by day records generally using first person sources. For anyone looking to develop a detailed knowledge of these events this would be a long but highly recommended source.

<sup>5</sup> A reasonable case can be made that Hitler had abandoned the goal of expanding eastward by 1939 based on related actions like scaling back the military and not equipping it for such a mission.

limit in relation to the British Navy in 1935. For the British this was an attempt to constrain Germany but for Germany it was a hoped for long term alliance that was abrogated by them on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1939 as the hope for this rapprochement faded. Their military was built for rapid land assaults and couldn't project power beyond that. Ultimately, even leveraging much broader support in Europe than is generally acknowledged, they simply didn't have the resources for such an objective. After defeating France and England in 1940 Germany actually decreased military spending sharply in an attempt to move back to a sustainable peace time economy (3). While the narrative of American intervention saving the world from Nazi domination makes for good storytelling, it's very difficult to objectively support. Pat Buchanan and many others have made this case very thoroughly but it has yet to overcome mainstream political historical narratives.

Turning to Russia, there is an alternate position argued by author Viktor Suvorov in his books *Icebreaker* (1985) and *The Chief Culprit* (2007) where he contends that Stalin had a grand plan of trying to overrun Europe after the European powers had exhausted themselves fighting each other. The initial premise is that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was intended to encourage Germany to initiate a European war (12). He contends that the Soviets had issued field maps of German territory that Stalin went to significant lengths to conceal the extent of Soviet mobilization prior to the war, and that Stalin had intended to attack Germany in July of 1941 having redeployed units from defensive to offensive positioning (12). This is considered to be a minority revisionist position and there have been numerous responses to it but the case is well laid out and academically it is seen generally as a serious hypothesis.

In assessing how practical a Russian invasion of Europe could have been, the theory has some clear challenges. Russia could also be assumed to have an interest in protecting Russian or Slavic peoples who were traditionally aligned with Russian civilization and they also had followed a policy of economic self sufficiency. Russia had made vast strides toward this objective and, unlike Germany, had the natural resources necessary to make this a realistic objective without foreign colonies. Like Germany Russia lacked means and motivation for world conquest but was a very formidable land power that had withstood many attempts at invasion and would try to maintain defensible spaces as a buffer. They didn't have a history of fighting offensive wars, had not been successful when they had attempted to, and their overall war fighting strategy was and has remained slow aggressive attrition of enemy forces. While both Germany and Russia sought to be free from dependence on foreign trade and related financial structures, Britain, as a result of its size and geography, was based around foreign trade and needed this trade dependency to be as universal as possible and the US, being the creditor nation coming out of WWI, also chose to pursue this path. (3) This is not to say, however, that it wouldn't have made strategic sense for Stalin to pursue more limited objectives in Eastern Europe and in nations like Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, the thought process behind public policy decisions is not that well documented and is largely hidden from view. One of the biggest questions regarding Stalin before, during, and after the war is whether he is best seen as a philosophical Marxist or Russian nationalist.

## Germany, Jews, Boycotts, and Zionists

In Germany there was and remained a perception that the small but influential Jewish population there had effectively changed sides in the middle of the war working against their country and this suspicion centered around the Balfour declaration although Germany also appeared to have considered doing essentially the same thing to strategically outmaneuver England (13 p. 295). The allies were financed by the western financial houses, most notably the House of Morgan that had deep British ties, while Germans generally had to internally finance their own war effort and there could have been some impact on this based on Balfour although that was late in the war (14). Also, the American based Jewish German banking house of Kuhn and Loeb did not finance the western allies prior to Russia leaving the war due to opposition to Russian treatment of the Eastern European Jews but did after Russia was knocked out of the war. (15)

The November Revolution of 1918 could have brought about a Bolshevik type outcome in Germany but didn't. The revolution is viewed as having two stages. The revolution began with the sailor's mutiny in Kiel that took control of government and military installations across the country and by November 9<sup>th</sup> the German Republic was declared. The Kaiser and all the ruling aristocracy were removed from positions of power which brought to an end of the first stage of the revolution which was largely non-violent. The provisional government was referred to as the Council of the People's Deputies and consisted of representatives of the two main socialist parties and was led by Friedrich Ebert of the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSDP). From that point the revolution fractured between radical and more moderate factions. The far left Spartacists, who established the German Communist Party, initiated the Spartacist Uprising in Berlin that was suppressed by German paramilitary troops and the two leaders of the group, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were killed. The revolt then spread to other German regions including Bavaria, Bremen, and Wurzburg but was eventually put down leading to the Weimar Republic (16 pp. 8-12). With specific regard to the Jewish population of Germany was the perceived level of Jewish involvement with the more radical elements of the revolution. There is no solid demographic data on the makeup of the socialist groups but the common perception was that Jews, who made up only around 1% of the total German population, were dramatically over-represented at all levels of political left including its leadership both nationally and in specific regions. Notable Jewish Marxist leaders included Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, Paul Levi, Gustav Landauer, Eric Musham, Ernst Toller, Eugen Levine, Kurt Eisner, and Bela Kun (17). It isn't possible to say what percentage of the Jewish population in Germany at this time were socialists or communists or to determine what percentage of the left wing political parties and groups were Jewish but it is a certainty that they were conspicuously over-represented statistically in both the membership and leadership.

Another factor impacting the German perceptions of Jews was the moral collapse in Germany under the Weimar republic which was seen by many Germans as being tied directly to the media, which in turn, was seen as being a predominantly Jewish industry. Whether this is factually true or not is difficult to validate but it was commonly perceived. Berlin, which was the most liberal or progressive area of Germany, became the vice capital of Europe and, because of the poor exchange rate, it was also the global capital of sexual tourism with virtually every type of vice and fetish being readily available. To the progressive this may be celebrated but to those who were more socially conservative it was an object of



disgust and shame (18 p. 129). The following account of the sexual perversion (or freedom depending on one's perspective) that was common in Berlin is taken from Austrian writer Stefan Zweig:

*"All values were changed and,,, Berlin was transformed into the Babylon of the World. Bars, amusement parks, , honky-tonks sprang up like little mushrooms... Along the entire Kurfurstendamm powdered and rouged young men sauntered and they were all professional; every high school boy wanted to earn some money and in the dimly lit bars one might see government officials and men of the world of finance tenderly courting drunken sailors without any shame. Even the Rome of Suetonius had never know such orgies as the pervert balls of Berlin where hundreds of men costumed as women and hundreds of women as mew danced under the benevolent eye of the police. In the collapse of all values a kind of madness gained hold particularly in the bourgeois which until then had been unshakable in their probity...But the most revolting thing about this pathetic eroticism was its spuriousness. At bottom the orgastic period was nothing more than a feverish imitation...The whole nation, tired of war, actually longed for order."* Stefan Zweig (18 p. 129)

This is, however, the opinion of one notable commentator from the time and can't be quantifiably assessed. It may be overstated or it may not.

Hitler was openly anti-Jewish and his views had been consistent although not necessarily outside of general public opinion of the time period and were based largely on economics as opposed to theology. Hitler wrote the following in *"first letters on the Jews"* on 16 September, 1919:

*"If the threat with which Jewry faces our people has given rise to understandable hostility on the part of a large section of our people, the cause of this hostility must be sought in the clear recognition that Jewry as such is deliberately or unwittingly having a pernicious effect on our nation... All this results in that mental attitude and the quest for money, and the power to protect it, which allow the Jew to become so unscrupulous and his choice of means... His power is the power of money, which multiplies in his hands effortlessly and endlessly through interest, and with which he imposes a yoke upon the nation that is the more pernicious in that its glitter disguises in ultimately tragic consequences... The result of his works is racial tuberculosis of the nation."* Adolf Hitler

When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933 it's widely believed that this began the systematic persecution of the German Jews but this was incremental involving a number of back and forth measures that should be looked at in detail in the context of a rapidly evolving timeline. Hitler became Chancellor as the major figure in a coalition government but didn't consolidate power until 1934. On March 12, 1933 the American Jewish Congress, which was primarily not Zionist, announced a protest at Madison Square Gardens scheduled for March 27. In the meantime, on March 23, 20,000 Jews protested at New York's City Hall (19). According to *The Daily Express* of London of March 24, 1933, the headline read "Judea Declares War on Germany - Jews of All the World Unite - Boycott of German Goods - Mass Demonstrations." It went on to say:

*"The whole of Israel throughout the world is uniting to declare an economic and financial war on Germany. The appearance of the Swastika as the symbol of the new Germany has revived the old war symbol of Judas to new life. Fourteen million Jews scattered over the entire world are tight to each other as if one man, in order to declare war against the German persecutors of their fellow believers.*

*The Jewish wholesaler will quit his house, the banker his stock exchange, the merchant his business, and the beggar his humble hut, in order to join the holy war against Hitler's people."*

Germany's Jewish Central Association (the *Verein*) opposed the boycotts led by foreign Jewish leaders and the contention that the new government was deliberately provoking anti-Jewish uprisings although there had been sporadic anti-Jewish violence by that time. The *Verein* issued a statement that *"the responsible government authorities are unaware of the threatening situation," saying, "we do not believe our German fellow citizens will let themselves be carried away into committing excesses against the Jews."* (19) The German government was clearly trying to contain the growing tension - both within Germany and without but to no avail with the US being the center of anti-German activism. In the United States, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull wired Rabbi Stephen Wise of the American Jewish Congress saying: *"Whereas there was for a short time considerable physical mistreatment of Jews, this phase may be considered virtually terminated.... A stabilization appears to have been reached in the field of personal mistreatment.... I feel hopeful that the situation which has caused such widespread concern throughout this country will soon revert to normal."* (19)

The boycott was crippling to Germany. Jewish scholar Edwin Black reported that, in response to the boycott, German exports were cut by 10 percent, and that many were demanding the seizure of German assets in foreign countries (20) When the boycott began, the German economy was in shambles with app. 3 million Germans on public assistance with a total of 6 million unemployed. (19 pp. 41-45)

In response to this the German government announced a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany on April 1 that followed a speech by Hitler on March 28<sup>th</sup> and the situation for German Jews got steadily worse from there. Following the Reichstag fire camps on February 27<sup>th</sup> 1933 a network of prison camps started to be constructed for political dissidents (21 p. 310). The Nuremberg Laws were put in place in September of 1935 making Jews legally different and subject to legal discrimination but nothing approaching genocide. The German strategy seemed to be to make their lives difficult enough that they would leave and this largely is what took place. Prior to the Kristallnacht Pogrom in November of 1938 (this followed the assassination of German diplomat Ernst Vom Rath by a Polish Jewish teenager in Paris) it is estimated that half the Jewish population had fled Germany and between November 1938 and September of 1939 as many as half of those who remained also left. Still there was no mass deportation or reported destruction of the Jewish population until June of 1942. (22 p. 310)

A highly significant but largely forgotten or overlooked piece of history surrounding these events was that the Jewish Zionist trying to settle Palestine had the same general goal as the German government as both sought Jewish migration out of Germany and they worked fairly closely with the Third Reich to bring that about (19) (23 pp. 295-300). Previously the majority of German Jews identified themselves as Germans and had little sympathy with the Zionist in promoting Jewish migration to Palestine. The

Zionists saw Hitler was likely to push the anti-Zionist German Jews towards their cause. Making the situation in Germany as uncomfortable for the Jews as possible served this end as did ensuring that Germany remained diplomatically isolated and unable to negotiate a treaty with England or Poland. This led to the Transfer Agreement that mandated that Jewish capital leaving the country could go only to Palestine. (19) The Transfer Agreement in turn created a close relationship between German banking houses and financial institutions that Author Edwin Black described as follows in his book The Transfer Agreement:

*It was one thing for the Zionists to subvert the anti-Nazi boycott. Zionism needed to transfer out the capital of German Jews, and merchandise was the only available medium. But soon Zionist leaders understood that the success of the future Jewish Palestinian economy would be inextricably bound up with the survival of the Nazi economy. So the Zionist leadership was compelled to go further. The German economy would have to be safeguarded, stabilized, and if necessary reinforced. Hence, the Nazi party and the Zionist organizers shared a common stake in the recovery of Germany. (20)*

Largely as a result of the transfer agreement the initially Jewish population in Palestine came largely from Germany. Roughly 50,000 Jews escaped Germany from 1933 to 1939 after having gone through a sort of Zionist familiarization or indoctrination before being accepted. (23 pp. 307-08)

### **Trade and Regional Conflicts Gradually Set Stage for Broader War**

World War II was a conflict that developed slowly with all major countries playing a role in bringing it about and having had an opportunity to stop it from expanding. The most important test of wills, however, may not have been between competing nations but between Chamberlain and Churchill for determination of British policy. Ultimately Churchill won and was able to define the historical narrative and the collective western memory. Chamberlain's proclamation of "*Peace in Our Time*" might have come to pass had Britain not chosen to issue a war guarantee over a small region in Poland that was inhabited by Germans and was indefensible from the perspective of England.

To summarize the path to the fateful year of 1939

- Reparations and allied war debt to the US created a world economy that was characterized by sovereign debt that couldn't be repaid.
- In January 1923 French troops moved into the Ruhr which would have crippled German industry and trade with Britain (24 pp. 28-30) leading to a general strike in Germany and the cessation of reparation payments
- The US stepped in with the Dawes Plan that restructured the debt and built foreign financing enabling Germany to make the payments and more.
- Foreign financing poured into Germany with little regard as to what it was for and whether it could actually be repaid. 55% of these loans came from the US (24 p. 30).
- The Dawes Plan, which was followed by the Young Plan in 1929, was partially successful at bringing the Weimar Republic out of hyper-inflations and stabilizing the government and economy.

- The US expanded its currency base dramatically which led to an economic crisis that was to spread across the world (10 pp. 260-75).
- After the US stock market crash, the capability to support the Weimar government faded. All reparations were suspended in 1931 (25) and Hitler rose to power in 1932.
- When Roosevelt was elected President in 1932 the new administration reversed course from the Hoover administration that was attempting to soften the American approach to Allied war debt and normalize the world economy away from being dominated by sovereign debt issues.
- The world economy descended in a trade war with competing blocks. Germany's strategy here was to pursue bilateral barter agreements which was relatively successful and gave them a significant economic foothold in Central and South America. (2)
- Germany under Hitler's leadership went about undoing the results of Versailles uniting German speaking peoples and reversing territorial losses. To the East Russia generally did the same but apart from war in China none of these were kinetic conflicts at this point in time.
- Germany actively pursued rapprochement with Great Britain agreeing to a 35% total tonnage limit in relation to the British Navy in 1935.
- Poland aggressively persecutes ethnic and religious minorities especially Germans.
- Germany under Hitler incrementally ramps up persecution of a relatively small Jewish population in Germany drawing international condemnation especially from the American Jewish population who are largely not Zionists.
- In March of 1936 Hitler moved troops into the Rhineland. The remilitarization of the Rhineland which was a 50 km area intended to be a buffer that would allow the French Army to readily occupy the Ruhr which was the center of German industry in the event of a war. This is commonly cited as a major step towards the European war.
- In 1938 the reunification with Austria (Anschluss) was his most significant accomplishment prior to the war.

Drawing general themes from the events, following Versailles the world economy can be characterized as a creditor / debtor conflict that was further complicated by massive political upheaval caused by the destruction of historical nation states and the creation of new ones. Had the US taken a different approach towards the allied war debt the situation would have developed very differently but for France and England there was very direct linkage between receiving German reparations and being able to pay their war debt to America. The US funded Germany through the Dawes and Young plans and also supported the British pound valuation scheme through monetary policy until the collapse of 1929 which brought about a temporary halt to US investment and the creditor / debtor conflict turned into a global trade war. Meanwhile there were localized ethnic and territorial disputes that centered on the newly created states in Eastern Europe while Germany (and also Russia) went about undoing the territorial transfers brought about by WWI. There were threats of military conflict but no actual war and the potential conflict regions were localized to specific areas in Eastern Europe. The only global situation was the sovereign debt issue and related problems associated with it.

This string of events had a tipping point when Roosevelt was elected president in 1932. Hoover had come to fully appreciate the importance of addressing international debt in order to stabilize the world

economic and political situation and was in the process of reviving the War Debt Commission to address the issue but the incoming Roosevelt administration would not support the idea. Congress had agreed to a one year moratorium on debt payments but this was due to expire on December 15, 1932 and Britain and France were reaching out to the new administration to determine their position as Britain and France had respectively \$95.5 million and \$19.3 million due on December 15<sup>th</sup> and these payments were not budgeted (8 pp. 95-97). Britain paid in full on December 15<sup>th</sup> insisting on debt renegotiation while France chose to default (8 p. 95). Roosevelt's chief advisor on debt and international trade during this transition period was Raymond Moley who was Professor of Public Law at Columbia University and was appointed Assistant Secretary of State. Moley specifically didn't want to serve under Secretary of State Hull who he considered an "internationalist" (8 p. 91). Moley became the documenter of many of these decisions in his book "Seven Years". Moley wrote of "the collapse of the system of international economics which had, to that time prevailed" saying:

*"Those to whom the gold-standard and free-trade were the twin deities of an unshakable orthodoxy – the international banker, the majority of our economists, and almost every graduate at every Eastern university who had dipped into the fields of foreign relations or economics – had undertaken to discover a remedy for it. By common consent they had settled upon reparations and war debts. If these were cancelled (these particular debts among all debts – public and private) or traded for general European disarmament or British resumption of the gold standard or what not, we would root out the cause of our troubles, they had announced. And so ponderous were the arguments that buttressed this formula in the Atlantic states – in academic and presumably "intellectual" circles, at any rate – that it was actually unrespectable not to accept them. Only their prospective dupes, the majority of the American citizens, stubbornly refused to swallow them." Raymond Morley (8 p. 89) (26 p. 69)*

Hoover announced to Congress in a special message on December 19<sup>th</sup> that the US government had refused to grant the European nations any further postponements. The position of Roosevelt and his advisors was to remain remarkably consistent through the trade wars of the 1930's and was never acknowledged to have been a strategic error (8 pp. 94-98). Yet their contention that they were acting in the interest of "the majority of American citizens" as Moley contended is certainly subject to argument. While the global economic conflict was fully formed and showed now viable path for improvement apart from the sort of general reset that a war could bring about, it was still somewhat difficult to develop a scenario that would result in another global war.

The next territorial objectives for Germany beyond the Rhineland and Austria were the reunification with the Sudetenland in the newly created state of Czechoslovakia and the Danzig region in western Poland which was another newly created state carved out of Germany. Both of these had historically German populations and, in the case of Danzig in particular, were under heavy ethnic persecution by the Polish government and were localized. Chamberlain's Munich Accord in September of 1938 ceded the Sudetenland to Germany. The agreement did contain a guarantee to maintain the integrity of Czechoslovakia as a nation which was later violated although a counter argument can also be made that the state was destined to fall apart on its own. Chamberlain returned to a hero's welcome proclaiming "peace in our time" which was a phrase from an Anglican prayer book. Churchill, who was Chamberlain's

greatest critic, stated in opposition, “*You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war*” (27).

This sounds very noble but was Churchill’s position in the interest of the British people? Sudetenland was over 1000 miles from London and there was no practical way for the British to access it in order to mount some sort of defense. Further, Britain had only put two armored divisions of which only twelve could have been considered combat ready (28). Chamberlain favored negotiating with Germany on these two regions and did not see Germany as posing a significant danger to England. Churchill and the coalition he built for war argued that Hitler was intended to conquer all of Europe and perhaps the world and this is the position that would control the media and persuade the British public.

### **Proposed Russian, British, French Alliance**

Churchill, along with Lloyd George on the political left sought an alliance with Stalin’s Russia while Chamberlain resisted this and eventually sabotaged the negotiations with Russia. As the situation in Europe continued to degrade into 1939 discussions began in March between Britain, France, and the Soviet Union of a proposed alliance to counter German expansion that were driven principally by the Russians. This was known at the time especially in Europe but this information has been largely lost to the current historical narrative (28). Anglo-French elites hated and feared the Soviets yet there were divisions. One group being realists and recognizing Nazi Germany as the greater threat favored an alliance with the USSR (29). The Labour and Liberal parties strongly favored such an alliance but so did some conservatives. Conservative Winston Churchill, who supported the alliance prior to becoming prime minister, argued that without an alliance England could not help would-be allies in Eastern Europe. Lloyd George (former wartime prime minister) teamed with Churchill in the House of Commons to push then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to conclude the alliance. The British public was well aware of the joint security proposal and strongly supported it. A Gallup poll in 1939 showed 87% in favor of and only 7% opposed yet it never happened. (30 p. 3)

One of the reasons for this was that Chamberlain and most other conservatives were hard core opponents of the Soviets with the party having risen to power in 1924 exploiting the “Zinoviev letter” and the Red Scare. In 1927 Torie “die hards” succeeded in breaking diplomatic relations with the Soviets and in 1936 conservative foreign secretary Anthony Eden halted rapprochement with the Russians on accusations of “*communist propaganda*”. Without pressure from his ministers there would have been no negotiations with the Soviets at all but at first a few of them did and then as war approached, nearly all of them (28). The Red Army could immediately mobilize 100 divisions while Britain could only put two armored divisions into France in the first weeks of war (28 p. 3). By 1939 the British Imperial General Staff recognized the obvious disparity in military capability and supported the alliance. Political cartoonist David Low in March published a cartoon showing Chamberlain being pushed from behind to a line entitled “*collective security*” but being unwilling to cross it and another in May showing the PM on a horse named “*Anglo-Rus*” that wouldn’t run (28)<sup>6</sup>. Chamberlain, making no secret of his opposition to

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<sup>6</sup> If the subject was addressed multiple times by a known political cartoonist it can be assumed that the topic was generally known to all.

his sister, wrote, *'It doesn't make things easier to be badgered for a [meeting] of Parliament'*, and added, *"and Winston... is the worst of the lot, telephoning almost every hour of the day."* He then went on to say Lloyd George was a close second to Churchill and that he was *"egging on"* the opposition by his *'pathetic belief that in Russia is the key to our salvation.'* (31) Historian William Henry Chamberlin described Prime Minister Chamberlain's final position on a potential Soviet Pact as follows:

*Whether the Soviet Union would have entered the war even if it's demands had been granted is doubtful. But it was politically and morally impossible to accede to these demands. For this would have amounted to conceding to Stalin that very right of aggression against weaker neighbors which was the ostensible cause of fighting Hitler. Such glaring inconsistencies may be tolerated in war, as the records of Tehran and Yalta testify. But the coercion of friendly powers to part with sovereignty and territory was impossible in peace time. (21 p. 290)*

The Soviet attitude towards the English and French during this period can be characterized by *"mistrust and cynicism"* which was inflamed by policies of appeasement and perceived anti-Soviet hostility based on both philosophy and a belief in ethnic superiority (28). The principal Soviet negotiator during this time was Maksim M. Litvinov who was commissar for foreign affairs and the Soviet ambassador to the UK was Ivan Maisky. The Russians had determined that the French were *"subservient to London's ukaz' and headed towards 'catastrophe'"* (28) and that Britain had obtained the *"complete subordination... of French foreign policy"* (28). He also saw the weakness of France as drawing the attention of the Germans from the east; *"France was practically done for: she was...full of German agents, disaffected and disunited... He [Litvinov] foresaw in the not far-distant future a Europe entirely German from the Bay of Biscay to the Soviet frontier and bounded, as it were, simply by Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Even that would not satisfy German ambitions but the attack, he said smiling happily, would not be directed to the East"* (32)

On March 20 the French and British did finally agree to a four way declaration calling for consultations in the event of a threat to European peace. Polish Minister Beck, however, rejected the proposal a few days later. The Poles were long standing adversaries of the Russians with the Polish elite generally hating the Russians and, despite reassurances from the Soviet diplomats, they vetoed the agreement because they did not want to be *"associated openly with the Soviet government', or to provoke Germany"* (33). The dispute between the Germans and the Poles had principally to do with the Danzig area that was ethnically German and was taken from Germany in the Treaty of Versailles along with portions of the Posen and West Prussia provinces. The *"Polish Corridor"* ensured Polish access to the Baltic Sea (34). Hitler had been very clear of his intent to reunify German / German speaking peoples and said in January of 1939 *"Danzig was German, would always remain German, and sooner or later would return to Germany"* (34). Poland had repeatedly rejected this position although the British generally seemed to concede this point. (1)

In April there was some progress as France became convinced of Germany's intent to expand and without allies France could not offer an effective defense. This is generally seen as the third major

diplomatic step leading to the start of the war. Britain concluded an Anglo-Polish bilateral security agreement on April 6<sup>th</sup> followed by similar agreements with Romania and Greece on April 13<sup>th</sup> (28). France in short order followed Britain's lead although it should again be emphasized that neither had any capability to make good on these agreements. All of these agreements were bluffs and the British government appeared to have some second thoughts over these agreements after the fact (1). Based on any sort of economic, demographic, or geographical analysis this would seem to be obvious which leads to the question of why the Poles and Beck in particular chose to stand by the Anglo-French security guarantee and why they didn't bargain with the Germans? The easy answer is to simply say the Germans would have overrun Poland anyway and that it was just a matter of time. This could possibly have been true but it still would have spared Poland the effect of the invasion and Poland would seem to have more in common with Germany. If the Poles had negotiated away Danzig and the corridor the next logical step would have been for the Poles to enter into a treaty with the Germans against the Russians which, using history as a guide, would have seemed more likely. Did the Poles really think the French and British could make good on their promise? It can't be definitely determined but key decision makers clearly did and they also based their assessment of their own capabilities on common memory as opposed to current reality.

Coinciding with these events, Stalin instructed Litvinov to direct Maisky to be less negative with British PM Halifax and to express Russian openness to security guarantees with Romania to preserve its independence (28). Litvinov sent Stalin a proposal for a three way political and military alliance with England and France that was five to ten years in duration and was reciprocal including defense of Russia's Black Sea ports<sup>7</sup>. The French were very receptive to this proposal as they had the most immediate risk and the proposal had strong public support in both England and France but there remained some opposition on the right. While France responded favorably, the English remained silent. Britain continued to stall and negotiate separately with the French for the next couple of weeks. The Poles continued to be an issue and there was a concern that they could go over to the German side breaking the anti-German entente of England, France, and Poland and, had they not overestimated their own military capability and acted in the best interest of their country, they would have. Chamberlain and Halifax continued to hold out for a unilateral agreement (35) that would give the Russians nothing of value. By the end of April, Stalin replaced Litvinov with Molotov. On May 14<sup>th</sup> Molotov informed his French and British counterparts that unilateral agreements were unacceptable and this stalemate continued throughout the summer. There were some significant logistical issues that, while not a primary reason for not reaching an agreement, are of some interest and again it involved the Poles. If Poland or Romania would not agree to allow Red Army troops to cross their territory they could not access the potential foe. (28)

### **German - Polish Negotiations, German - Russian Treaty, Invasion of Poland**

Throughout the entire period of time when multinational negotiations were taking place, Germany continued to negotiate directly with Poland with a series of six talks starting on October 24, 1938 and

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<sup>7</sup> Brittan still had a significant Naval capability with a fleet size roughly comparable to the United States



continuing through August 30, 1939 (36). These talks were based around an eight point plan proposed by Germany that remained generally consistent throughout the negotiations. The eight points are as follows:

1. The Free State of Danzig returns to the German Reich.
2. Through the Corridor an extraterritorial Reich highway, belonging to the Germans, and an extraterritorial multi-track railway is built.
3. Poland likewise retains in the Danzig area an extraterritorial road or highway, and railway, and a free port.
4. Poland receives a guaranteed market for its goods in the Danzig region.
5. The two nations recognize their common borders (guarantee) or the territories of the two sides.
6. The German-Polish Treaty is extended from 10 to 23 years.
7. Poland accedes to the Anti-Communist Treaty.
8. The two countries add to their treaty a consultation clause. (3 p. 489) (36 p. Doc 81)

Apart from internal politics in Poland this all may well have happened but in 1937 Col Beck's "understanding" with Germany was attacked by political opponents and the press leaving him little negotiating room and minority persecution reached new levels. The press in Poland plays a major role in this. On November 19, 1938 Ambassador Lipski tells Minister of Foreign Affairs von Ribbentrop<sup>8</sup> that Beck will not be able to comply with Germany's proposal regarding Danzig (3 pp. 489-90). In January of 1939 Germany went so far as to propose that *"Danzig comes politically to the German community and remains economically with Poland"* but this too is rejected (36). This was only seven weeks after von Ribbentrop had concluded a German-French non-aggression pact where the Germans renounced by treaty Alsace and Lorraine. In exchange for this von Ribbentrop expects that the French will not interfere with his negotiation in Poland but the French torpedoed the negotiations by telling Poland on the first day of the January talks that the Poles can count on the full backing of the French and British with regard to Danzig. On January 26<sup>th</sup>, a date coordinated with von Ribbentrop's meeting with Beck, French Foreign Minister Bonnet gave a speech outlining the foreign policy of the National Assembly in Paris:

*"In the event of war... if England and France should be drawn into it, all the forces of Great Britain are available to France as all the forces of France are to Great Britain... Regarding the relations with Poland, it suffices to recall that the Polish Foreign Minister Beck has declared that the Polish-French friendship invariably represents one of the foundations of Polish politics."* (3 pp. 491-2)

The negotiations over an Anglo-French-Russian mutual defense pact finally broke down in late July and August as the result of two more British blunders. Sir Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's main advisor, and Robert Hudson, Secretary for Overseas Trade, entered into discussions in London with Helmut Wohlthat,

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<sup>8</sup> Von Ribbentrop was sentenced to death in the Nuremberg trial for his "role in starting the war" and was the first prisoner to be hung

a senior German economics official. The primary message of these talks was that if Hitler stopped his aggressive policies there could still be Anglo-German Entente (28). On July 22 the news of the meeting leaked to the press and this drew a sharp response from the House of Commons. Chamberlain was angry with Hudson but only because the press became aware of the meeting. The door remained open through back-door channels. Next the British sent a low-level military delegation to Moscow to continue negotiations on a slow moving merchant ship with instructions to “*negotiate slowly*” (28). While the conservative leadership acted as if they were entirely unaware that the Russians could also reach out to Germany but political commentators and the public in general weren’t and saw this as a real risk. Political cartoonist David Low drew two cartoons showing Nazi representatives sitting in Molotov’s outer office or standing at his door waiting for British and French diplomats to leave (37).

On August 16 Molotov told the US ambassador that “*the time for empty public declarations was over and that only concrete obligations*’ for mutual assistance against aggression were acceptable for Moscow. (38)” The next day, Molotov handed Schulenburg a proposal for a non-aggression Pact which was signed in Moscow on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. The treaty between Fascist Germany and Communist Russia was seen as a disaster by the American left who suddenly opposed intervention in the European war (1 p. 301). On August 20<sup>th</sup> of 1939 the Soviets, now able to focus on the Japanese in Mongolia without a German threat, launched a major counter offensive to end fighting in Khalkhin-Gol. The Wehrmacht invaded Poland eight days later on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September with the threat of immediately opening a second front with Russia removed. Hitler’s blitzkrieg on Poland was closely observed by the world’s press. England declared war on September 2<sup>nd</sup> but no promised assistance ever came. Russia attacked from the East on September 17 crushing and dividing Poland (1 p. 299). On November 26, 1939 The Russians invaded Finland after the Germans didn’t respond to their request for assistance also as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (34). The Soviets gained eastern Poland and effectively controlled the Baltic States. Further the Soviets agreed to continue to supply Germany with raw materials including oil (39). This would generally guarantee that the Germans could not be choked by a naval blockade as happened in WWI. Although it would appear Britain got nothing out of all of this, an alternative explanation offered by CG Tansill (9) was that Chamberlain intended to put the two main combatants, Russia and Germany on a common border so that, if a war started, it would go eastward and he was by no means the only one to propose this as a possibility even during the negotiations. Also on September 15<sup>th</sup> the Japanese were forced to accept a cease-fire in Khalkhin-Gol.

In the aftermath of all of this there was a good deal of maneuvering to try to place blame. The British and French accused the Russians of double crossing them but the British in particular were also negotiating with Germans and were doing so before the Russians. The British compiled a white paper in order to deflect the blame of the failed negotiations on the Russians but even after careful preparation to support the intended message it still couldn’t hide the fact that the Soviets made serious proposals and the British failed to offer serious responses (28). The French further opposed issuing the paper because it failed to differentiate between the French position, which was more receptive to the Russian

proposals, and the British (28)<sup>9</sup>. The entire affair is largely lost to popular history but to the extent that it is addressed it's most commonly given a philosophical explanation that allying with the Russians would be a betrayal of the Baltic States to someone seen as being "*almost as bad as Hitler*". In the end that happened anyway and there was really no way to prevent it from happening but the detailed records of the negotiations don't support this at all. The parties involved, especially the British, acted in what they thought to be their own best interest and/or personal motives.

The failed (or sabotaged) German negotiations with Poland also could not stand the "*light of day*" of open public disclosure. Hitler's last proposal involves a referendum for self-determination which was similar to an earlier proposal by Lloyd George. The wife of the just resigned First Lord of the Admiralty Cooper related a story that her husband was "*horror stricken*" when he heard how reasonable Germany's final proposal was that he then called the editors of the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph to ask them to present the German proposal in an unfavorable light (3 p. 504). French historian Paul Rassinier wrote after the war. "*It seems correct that, if the French and British peoples had known of these propositions on 30 August, Paris and London could not have declared war on Germany, without unleashing a wave of protestations that would have imposed peace.*" A related question regarding Germany is why were they as patient as they were with regard to Poland? The answer would seem to be that Germany was intent on breaking the British-French-Polish anti-German Entente. Their preferred solution for doing this was always to peel off England which was why they didn't pursue a more aggressive naval buildup much sooner but breaking away Poland was another acceptable solution that would also provide a barrier to the East if they were to re-align with Germany. (3 p. 504)

## Operation Pike

Another proposed initiative on the road to global war that never progressed past the detailed planning stage but continues to feature the decision making process of the French and English elite was Operation Pike. Operation Pike was an allied plan to execute a night attack with as many as 100 planes on Soviet oil fields in the Caucus flying from airfields in Iran, Syria, and Turkey (40). The planes to be used in this weren't what were available late in the war like a Lancaster bomber that could carry 7 tons of bombs but were rather the Blenheim that could carry only half a ton (39). The objective seemed to be to significantly damage Germany's oil supply while also inflicting similar harm to the Soviets along with economic damage (two birds for one stone to use an old British saying). Planning for this mission started just after Russia's invasion of Finland after the abrupt end of this conflict the Russians sent substantial reinforcements to the Black Sea area. (41)

Bombing and especially night bombing was a new thing in World War II and this was the very start of the war so some degree of overconfidence may be understandable but this was more on the order of recklessness. Both the accuracy and impact of such a bombing campaign was drastically overrated. The first attempts at night bombing by the British in 1940 were so bad that the bombs missed their intended

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Carley's paper from International History Review devotes the last half of the paper to the spin and cover up for the failed negotiations

targets by miles and the Germans hardly noticed them (39). Even in 1944 with the best available radar and navigation equipment they couldn't hit pinpoint targets and would commonly just get in the general vicinity of what they were aiming at (39). Even if they somehow hit the target, experience from WWII and every conflict since then has shown that bomb damage can be repaired relatively quickly with minimal long term impact. This plan simply had no chance of achieving any significant impact on either Russia or Germany but had greater potential to damage Russia.

Still, perhaps if there was solid intelligence supporting this operation, maybe the decision to proceed with it could at least be defended but that wasn't the case either. The allied intelligence reports had determined that the Soviet oil fields made up only a small part of Germany's oil supply and that the Romanian oil fields were far more significant (41). Author Patrick Osborn in his book "Operation Pike" summarized this saying, *"The important thing here is not the accuracy of the British intelligence reports but that British and French leaders alike were willing to overlook them in order to pursue their idea of attacking the USSR in order to bring under the feet of Germany: the principle of killing two birds with one stone' taken to ridiculous links."* (41)

Planning for Operation Pike reached the point where planes flying from airfields in Iraq photographed oilfields in Baku and Batumi in March of 1940 (41). Fortunately it never was carried out as the situation on the ground changed dramatically before it could be but it raises interesting and ominous questions as to what might have been if the war had progressed a bit more slowly. Further the plan was supported by some of the most influential people in the British government including soon to be Prime Minister Winston Churchill. (41)

## Churchill Opens Up the War

The invasion of Poland and declarations of war that followed didn't necessarily guarantee a broader European war and from September of 1939 to the beginning of April in 1940 the warring sides did nearly nothing. The French and British, largely due to the efforts of Churchill, rejected numerous German peace proposals after Poland fell and France focused on preparing defenses while both Britain and France both refused to negotiate. The Roosevelt administration, however, attempted to probe negotiating positions in the context of the *"Peaceful World Order"* which packaged US trade and financial interests into a global *"rules based order"*. This specifically focused on five key questions: *the future of Poland, the future of Czechia, the economic order in Europe, disarmament, and human rights* (26 p. 280). The German reaction to this was in most respects surprisingly favorable and reasonable. US under Secretary of State Wells, acting on Roosevelt's direction, initiated dialogue with the Germans and was informed that the position backed by Hitler and Goring is that the Germans were willing to withdraw from Poland, with the exception of Danzig and the Corridor, and also from Czechia so long as it was to remain a demilitarized state. The economic issues, on the other hand, created a hard impasse.

The Germans would not back away from the barter based trade system with countries in southeastern Europe and South America who, like Germany, had weak currencies and difficulty getting external financing (42). Roosevelt was not interested in a peace that maintains this system which had served the Germans well and ran against American interests (43 pp. 20-25). On August 14, 1941, Roosevelt made the decision to continue war preparations and to enter the war on the side of England writing to his son

Elliot, *"British and German bankers for a fairly long time have had world trade running into their pockets...If German and British economic interests have collaborated in the past to exclude us from world trade, to repress our commercial shipping, and to exclude us from this or that market, if Germany and Great Britain now wage war against each other, what should we do?"* (3 p. 281) (44 p. 24)

For the Americans, this solves two problems at once. In order for the US to enter the war on the side of Britain they must renounce their Ottawa Special Economic Zone and with a joint victory over the Germans, the barter based German Special Economic Zone would also be eliminated. The German Zone was also effectively sealed off the international capital market and blocked access to the markets for countries in this system through preferential rules which hurts the British more than the Ottawa zone helps them so this is a reasonable trade. Roosevelt sums this all up stating again to his son Elliot, *"Does anyone want to maintain that Germany's attempt to dominate trade in Central Europe was not one of the main reasons for the war?"* (3 p. 282) (44 p. 37) For the Roosevelt administration, the conflict was a trade war adorned in moral garb although in fairness to FDR his correspondence with his son definitely did indicate that he had an understanding of the difficulties faced by developing countries and didn't necessarily envision the American dominant international financial system that was to take shape after the war. Still the idea of entering another European conflict was very unpopular on the American home front and would have to wait for the right circumstances to implement.

Shortly after the fall of Poland, Churchill came up with a plan to mine the St of Leads blocking German trade with Sweden and Norway which would cut off Germany's iron ore supply (22 pp. 385-6). Churchill then expanded the plan to include a military occupation of Sweden and Norway saying *"small nations must not tie our hands when we are fighting for their rights and freedom"*. The Winter War between Russia and Finland provided a pretext to do this based on the position that it was necessary to block the Russian Communists from invading Europe. On December 22<sup>nd</sup> Chamberlain gave in to Churchill, who was winning the public debate, and notified the Scandinavian government that they intended to militarily stop the supply of iron ore. The proposed British action was by January 1940 the subject of Parliamentary debate and common knowledge to all. In February the Winter War ended with Stalin winning some relatively small concessions from the Finns and the cover for a British invasion was gone before it could be put into motion but the invasion force was staged and ready to go as was the counter German force that was much closer. Chamberlain argued that the entire operation be disbanded but was again opposed by Churchill who brought about a no confidence vote by late March and Chamberlain yielded and put the plan into action on April 5<sup>th</sup> (22 pp. 385-6). When the British started to mine the coast of Norway, the Norwegians protested but to no avail. When the King was told on the morning of April 9<sup>th</sup> that Norway was at war, he rightfully asked, "by whom?" Both sides set out at about the same time and within two months the Germans were in control. Militarily Churchill's plan had failed but he had "opened up the war" and was able to oust Chamberlain. At this point relatively small regional conflicts became a world war and it was entirely a matter of choice.

On May 10, 1940, The Germans invaded across the low countries of northern France and Netherlands. The Germans routed Dutch, Belgium, French, and British within a couple of weeks leading to the Dunkirk evacuation. Hitler did not close rapidly on the escaping forces and there are numerous theories for this but it allowed for a small allied victory at the end of a disastrous defeat. One theory is that he allowed the British to escape because he still sought a treaty with England and had Churchill not become prime minister, also in May, that might have happened (22 p. 319). Churchill continued to reject peace overtures from Germany and sought simply to stay in the war until England could be rescued by the US and/or Russia. Germany continued to seek an ally and tried very hard to establish a long term alliance with Russia and after the successful European campaign reduced the production of tanks and munitions by 1/3 to return to more of a peacetime economy. England got a soft commitment from Roosevelt who established plans for the conduct of the European war before the US was at war. The idea of entering the war was still broadly unpopular with the American people and this would have to wait for a trigger event and this turned out to be Pearl Harbor.

In September of 1940 Germany attempted to incorporate the Soviet Union into a triple alliance with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov was invited to visit Berlin but declined stating, to the surprise of the German side, that the "Secret Supplemental Agreement" of August 1939 addressing the allocation of areas of special interest in Eastern Europe was outmoded and needed to be renegotiated (26 pp. 668-70). The Soviets by that time had annexed all the states that in the 1939 agreement were designated as being in their sphere of influence. Their new position added to their sphere of influence Finland, the Danube, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey with its Black Sea access, Iran, Greece, Yugoslavia, the Baltic Sea outlets, and Spitsbergen (Arctic Islands off the coast of Greenland). If the Germans were to agree to this it would have cost them their raw material suppliers, Southeastern Europe trading partners, and access to the Baltic Sea. With a new pact with Stalin Hitler had hoped to cause the British to accept the peace terms that had already been offered to them but the revised Russian negotiating position was seen as threatening to trap Germany in a pincers between the English and Russia. To add to this there were continued reports of Soviet troops massing towards the Romanian border (26 p. 670).

## Germany Invades Russia

The final major shift in the situation was Germany's invasion of Russia with Operation Barbarossa in June of 1941. The logic or objectives behind this invasion isn't entirely clear and has been debated since with many former German officers claiming to have been very critical of it. The stated goals were to eradicate communism and to conquer the western soviet regions, including the Ukraine and Belarus, repopulating these areas with Germans creating more "living space" (lebensraum) for Germany as Hitler stated openly in Mien Camp (45 pp. 200-220). The operation was named after the 12<sup>th</sup> century Holy Roman emperor and crusader Fredrick Barbarossa or Red Beard (46 p. 470). It would also secure the oil fields of the Caucus region for the Germans. Common conjecture is that Hitler intended to enslave, deport, or exterminate the Slavic populations. In a statement attributed to Heinrich Himmler he was reported to have said, *"The purpose of the Russian Campaign was the decimation of the Slavic*

*population by thirty million*" (47 p. 237)<sup>1011</sup>. Another option to consider was "*Germanization*" of at least some elements of the population as people (48 p. 416) in the more western regions frequently considered themselves more European than Russian and this was ultimately to happen although well after the war and with outside intervention.

There is an alternate theory that these broader plans were largely bravado and had been abandoned by 1940 based on numerous related decisions that would appear not to support the broader objectives of expanding "living space" and the Hitler was reacting tactically to one unforeseen challenge after another. Specifically, if Hitler had a realistic long term plan to take Russian territory the following decisions (amongst a longer list) are difficult to explain:

1. The German military was not only not equipped with winter gear but didn't produce long range bombers and other platforms needed for such a campaign. (3 pp. 666-8)
2. Hitler allowed Poland to annex Oderberg, which is a German area. This would have provided a path to the east
3. In March of 1939 he turned down a request from Prime Minister Voloshin of newly independent Carpatho-Ukraine to put the country under German protective custody.
4. In August of 1939 Poland nearly started a war with Germany which Germany de-escalated. Again going to war at this point would have cleared a path to the east.
5. As late as 1939 Hitler had no real plan for an eastern war and when such a plan was formulated, he delayed the start three times.
6. After the successful European campaign Hitler had the production of tanks and munitions reduced by 1/3.

Whether this shows intent or just very bad planning can be debated. There is, however, one trigger that is certain and that is the Romanian Oil Fields. In June of 1940 Romania surrendered to Stalin without a fight reasoning that they could not resist their overwhelming force. Russian troops stopped short of taking over the Romanian oil fields but they easily could have and this would have been fatal to Germany. Specifically, in June of 1940 the Russians annexed Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and at the time had 170 Soviet divisions in the western military district facing 6 German reserve divisions in the border area between in the vicinity of the Polish and Russian border (3 p. 669). By the summer of 1940 Hitler had effectively won on the western front, making forces available and creating opportunity to act against the Soviets although that didn't appear to be the desired course of action. According to available evidence and testimony, The Germans had no solid plans for an attack on Russia until June of 1940. On July 21 of 1940 Hitler met with close staff to discuss a "*Russian Problem*" (12 p. 156).

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<sup>10</sup> The German plans were well outside the accepted norms for warfare and defined a plan to commit massive war crimes. Although it took some time after the war to arrive at consensus figures regarding the loss of life as such calculation are very difficult and subject to very large margins of error, the 6 million Jews reported killed in the holocaust are a subset of these policies. It isn't definitive, however, that the German saw them in a more negative light than Slavic populations.

<sup>11</sup> The German plans to dramatically shrink the Slavic population is somewhat similar to the Allied Morgenthau plan that sought to depopulate and de-industrialize Germany.

On July 29, the German military started developing contingency plans to attack Russia. After the German proposal to incorporate the Soviet Union into a triple alliance with Germany, Italy, and Japan was rejected by the Soviets in September of 1940 the planning for invasion accelerated. In the autumn of 1940 several high ranking German officers drafted a memorandum to Hitler warning of the dangers of an invasion of the Soviet Union arguing that the territories to be added would only become an economic burden on Germany and that the Soviet Union was a top heavy bureaucracy that would wind up being relatively harmless (49 pp. 69-70). A report that was drafted in 1940 predicted a net economic drain that was redrafted by General Georg Thomas to be more favorable in accordance with Hitler's expectations. (50 p. 162). By December 18, 1940 the German invasion plans were finalized six month in advance of the actual attack. (51 p. 51)

The invasion force for the Axis consisted of 3.8 million men, the largest invasion force in human history, invading along an 1800 mile (2900 kilometer) front with 600,000 motor vehicles and 600,000 horses (52 p. 384). The Russian front line forces were only about 2.9 million but their overall military was well over 5 million personnel although they were not fully prepared and the regions of Russia are vast. Russia also had a large advantage in tanks (11,000 to app. 3,000) and other military vehicles (7 – 9 K to 3 – 5K) (53 p. 385). The Russians had the largest air force in the world with 7100 to 9100 aircraft and an additional 1,500 under Naval control (54 p. 28). Other resource and industrial capacity comparisons also clearly favored the Russians. These demographic and logistical challenges would lead to some obvious question as to how such a plan could be activated in the first place and the answers tend to point at a combination of hubris and lack of accurate information on enemy capability (ignorance). The rapid victory in Europe had created a sense of invincibility and the German military leadership's assessment of the Soviet forces and especially their officer core was very negative as was the general view of Soviet society. Hitler summed this up by stating, "*We only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down*" (55 p. 6). The Red Army was seen as being inept in the Winter War with Finland which was a misinterpretation not considering the inherent difficulty in crossing a prepared defensive corridor built into terrain. Still the definitive point seems to be accurate data on military resources. Based on an 11 minute recorded conversation with Finland's Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim in 1942 that was recorded without his knowledge, Hitler didn't seem to appreciate the size and resources of the Russian Army, most notably the number of tanks (56). Hitler later said to his general staff, "*If I had known about the Russian tank strength in 1941 I would not have attacked*" (57 p. 456)

An alternate view of the initial invasion is provided by author Viktor Suvorov in his book *The Chief Culprit*. In this book he contends that the Soviets had repositioned their defenses in preparation for an invasion of Germany largely from the south leaving them vulnerable to an invading force. Specifically it contends that defensive barriers were removed. The counterpoint to this is that Soviet assets were being continually repositioned and that specific defensive zones weren't fully established. Suvorov's case involves a detailed and fairly exhaustive comparison of armaments and platforms where he contends that the Soviet weaponry wasn't just most numerous but more advanced and this is generally seen as being true although some of the newer Soviet platforms, most notably tanks, were only



available in limited quantities at the time of the invasions<sup>12</sup>. It's also pointed out that the capability definitely existed on the part of the Soviets to carry on an offensive war which isn't untrue. Chief Culprit is a favorite of anti-Russian historians but is not generally accepted and other books have been written to refute it. There are some very basic questions that would run contrary to this hypothesis such as why would Stalin want to conquer Europe? There are few if any resource related reasons to do this and Russia is large enough not to need to be highly dependent on trade. There was, however, a real possibility that the Soviets were willing to attack in order to expand their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe (3 p. 669). The fact that Germany was resource constrained, on the other hand, was a major factor in Germany's desire to expand eastward if that's, in fact, what they were doing. The difficulty and cost Russia incurred in the Winter War with Finland led them to accept limited objectives after heavy losses. This would be a small foreshadowing of what a broader invasion of Europe would involve. Russia had been invaded many times by European powers generally in the form of broad alliances but even when given circumstances to advance on European soil, they had always returned to their previous boundaries. Lastly, the Soviet purges were principally to remove Trotskyites who were predominant in European communism. How would this be addressed and what benefit would such an endeavor be to Russia?

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1941 the invasion began. The Germans were of course the main force but they were by no means alone. Romania, Finland, Italy, Hungary, and Slovakia all were part of the force invading Russia along with a large number of non-German Europeans that had joined the German forces. There were app. 500,000 non-Germans who had joined the Waffen-SS (58 p. 244)<sup>13</sup>. Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels referred to the invasion as the "European Crusade against Bolshevism". One of the more notable contingents of non-German Nazi's was the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Stephan Bandera who was to become an icon of Ukrainian nationalism in the decades following the war. Their role was to act as Ukrainian speaking policemen (59). Bandera hated communism and saw the Jews as the principal force behind the rise of Marxism stating, "*The Jews of the Soviet Union are the most loyal supporters of the Bolshevik Regime and the vanguard of Muscovite imperialism in the Ukraine*" (59). If this ever was true, after the Stalin purges, it no longer was. Of the Jewish deaths in the holocaust of WWII, app. 25% occurred in Ukraine (59). After the war Bandera and many of his core supporters lived out their lives in the west as intelligence assets. Bandera was eventually killed by the Soviets in 1959 but his self promotion would ensure that his legend would live on. (59)

The Soviets were initially routed in most areas and the Soviet command seemed not to fully understand the gravity of the situation commanding Russian forces to attack. Within the first week the Luftwaffe had achieved air superiority over all battlefields across the front but was suffering attrition losses and were spread thin over such a vast area. By July 5<sup>th</sup> they had lost 491 aircraft and 316 were damaged

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<sup>12</sup> The Russian German front was hundreds of miles long. Prepared defensive zones typically defend a point with defense being planned in depth or in layers around a high value target. Using an athletic example this is similar to a soccer goal or hockey goal as opposed to the line of scrimmage in an American football game. It is difficult to imagine prepared barriers stretching hundreds of miles for cost factors alone.

<sup>13</sup> The invading force is largely remembered in the west's collective memory as simply being German but the real makeup of these armies was reminiscent of the latest in a string of European attempts to overrun Russia when viewed from a Russian perspective.

leaving it at only 70% of the original strength (60 p. 19) (54 p. 54). The Germans and their allies had encircled large numbers of Soviet troops in Pincer moves resulting in a very large number of POW's but more had escaped (61 p. 88). By August 2<sup>nd</sup> the invading forces had suffered 179,500 casualties and had only been able to put in place 47,000 replacements (62 pp. 123-4). The German coalition was also beset with logistics problems and was encountering stiffer resistance than they had anticipated. Poor roads and weather (rain) were also taking a toll and the operation was slowed to allow for resupply and to adapt strategy (63 p. 189). Four weeks in the Germans realized that they had severely underestimated Russian strength (61 pp. 123-4).

Hitler's strategy now switched to economic targets focusing on the industrial center of Kharkov in the Donbas, the oil fields in the Caucasus, and Leningrad. The German high command was overwhelmingly opposed to this favoring an all out push to take Moscow but were unable to sway the Fuehrer (63 pp. 192-4). The effect of this decision has been debated since. By the end of August German and Finnish troops were only 48 kilometers from Leningrad but progress slowed and by September 9<sup>th</sup> Hitler determined that the city would be starved into submission as opposed to being stormed. As a result of this the Army became static and subject to counter attack resulting in the first Russian victory since fighting began in Yelnya Offensive (64). Following this Hitler determined that attention should shift back towards Moscow and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Armies broke off the siege and were reassigned to support an attack on Moscow (65 pp. 328-30). The Luftwaffe continued to suffer attrition and was struggling to maintain air superiority as the Soviets enjoyed some tactical advantage operating in cold weather (55 p. 103).

Soviet forces around Kiev were encircled on September 16<sup>th</sup> of 1941. Fighting continued for another 10 days but the defenders succumbed resulting in somewhere between 220,000 and 650,000 POW's (the claims on this number obviously vary wildly), 452,720 personnel, and 3867 artillery pieces (52 p. 94). Donbass and Crimea also collapsed with Karkhov being captured by the 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer Army on October 24<sup>th</sup>. The scope of the Russian losses gave some renewed hope to the idea that Moscow could be taken.

After the fall of Kiev the Russian Army no longer outnumbered the German coalition. There were only 800,000 in 83 divisions left to defend Moscow and only 27 of those divisions were fully functional. The path to Moscow, however, was prepared with elaborate defenses. The Soviet's first line defenses were rapidly defeated and encircled resulting in the loss of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 209<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 32<sup>nd</sup> Armies producing over 500,000 additional prisoners. There were now only 90,000 men and 150 tanks left to defend Moscow (52 p. 343). Rain, mud, and continuing supplier problems caused the Germans to pause Operation Typhoon on October 31<sup>st</sup> allowing the Russians to add reservists and consolidate their positions (66 pp. 178-9). In a month the Soviets had organized 11 new armies including 30 divisions of Siberian troops from the east that had been released when the Soviets became satisfied that there was no immediate threat from the Japanese (67 p. 245). Strategically it's notable here that as the Germans provided no relief for the Japanese against Russia at Khalkhin-Gol, neither did the Japanese provide a second front threat to limit the ability of the Soviets to transfer troops to defend Moscow. After the ground hardened the Germans resumed the attack on November 15<sup>th</sup> (68 pp. 174-5). The Wehrmacht came within 24 kilometers of Moscow but there the assault bogged down due to winter conditions and continuing supply problems (52 p. 106). The Soviets continued to add personnel who, although

inexperienced, were still proving effective (52 p. 86). On December 5<sup>th</sup> (two days before Pearl Harbor) the Soviet defenders launched a large counter offensive that by January 7<sup>th</sup> had pushed the Germans back 50 to 100 kilometers from Moscow (52 pp. 91-97). The Battle of Moscow was lost and it had cost the Wehrmacht 830,000 men (51 p. 209). From that point forward the Germans and their allies became weaker, being unable to replace their losses and their logistics problems worse. The Russians became stronger both militarily and industrially and survived another European invasion that had a lot of similarities to those that had come before it

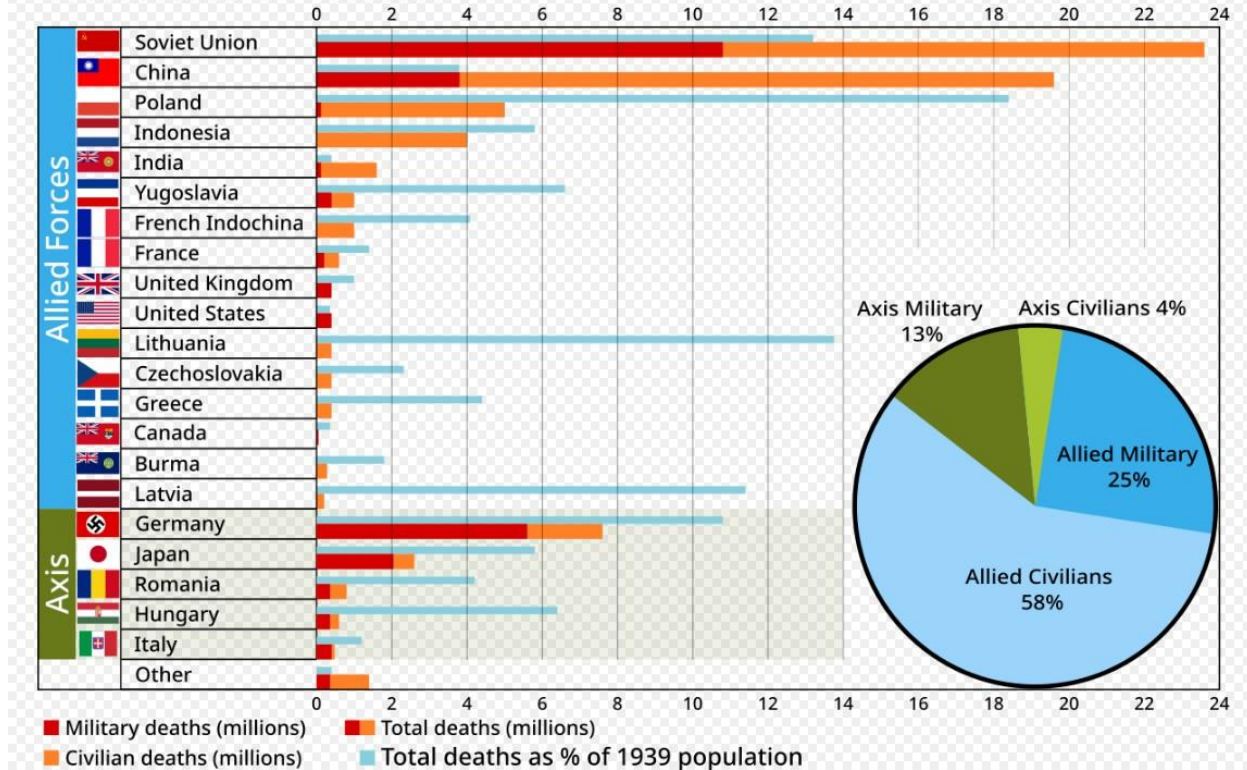
An early winter has been commonly cited as a key reason for the German defeat at the Battle of Moscow and there are a number of “what-ifs” that could be argued but in the end the side with more people, more resources, and who were fighting a defensive war with some prepared defenses won. Like those who came before him, Hitler and the German high command suffered heavy attrition, were denied resources and couldn’t logistically support their operation across an extremely large front, had to cross a vast area to reach their final objective, and “bled out” along the way. They underestimated the military resources they were up against but they also underestimated the Russian people. This also showcased a key difference between the new German blitzkrieg strategy and the Russian way of war that emphasizes aggressive attrition. One moves very rapidly against a weaker opponent but in this and future cases couldn’t overcome an entrenched adversary with peer to peer capabilities. The other philosophy that eventually prevailed gradually hollowed out their adversary until they were no longer able to offer effective resistance. One lesson that was reinforced here that has continued through the Cold War to the 2022 Ukraine/NATO war with Russia is the importance of Russia maintaining a significant buffer between Moscow and central Russia and the European frontier where the invasion force would be assembled and the need for Russia to maintain access to the Crimean Sea.

## A War against Civilians

A very reasonable case can be made that Germany invaded Russia for fear of a Russian attack that would, at a minimum, economically strangle them and at worse proceed into the rest of Europe. This led to a rapidly and inadequately planned invasion plan that didn’t account for the provisioning of their own forces and logistics chains over such a broad area. They further could have reasonably believed that their window of opportunity to do this was rapidly closing due to the vastly larger population and industrial capability of the Soviet Union. In doing this, however, they brought war not only to an opposing military force but to a very large civilian population in Eastern Europe, western Russia, and Belarus that they had no plan or capability to address. Apart from the Asian side of the global conflict, this is where the bulk of the death and destruction associated with WWII would occur.

Civilian deaths may be caused by direct military action but are more commonly caused by disease and famine and are difficult to count especially if the conflict extends for an extended period of time, as this one did. Determining the exact causes of death is also very difficult and speculative unless there is access to the crime scene immediately after the crimes. Finally the natural death rate must be considered which is significant for a war that goes on for years and is generally estimated to be between 1% and 2% depending on the age distribution of the population. All that being said the following chart from Wikipedia is a good mainstream estimation of civilian and military deaths associated with the war.

## World War II Deaths



The most historically notable of these civilian deaths, of course, are those associated with the Jewish holocaust which would take place in Eastern Europe (generally Poland) later in the war and apart from the German invasion of Russia, this wouldn't have been a war zone in the first place. Churchill is commonly seen as an iconic British statesman who stood against Nazi tyranny virtually alone and saved the world from German domination. British historian Niels Ferguson goes so far as to imply that England sacrificed itself and its empire to save the world from Nazism. Yet the evidence favors Chamberlain. (21 p. 313) There is virtually nothing to indicate that Germany had any intent to expand beyond their limited gains in Danzig and the Sudentland in the first place.

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