

Pawns, Provocateurs and Parasites:

Great Britain and German Fifth Column Movements in Europe and the Middle East, 1934 – 1941

By Sean Govan

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Masters by Research in History.



'A Sudeten German woman cried in misery as she gave the Nazi Party salute while two others saluted with happiness, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, 10 October 1938'. Source: German Federal Archive, Bild 183-H13160. Accessed via World War II Database http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=2221 29 October 2015.

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Note on the photograph on the front page

This photograph was taken by an unknown *Wehrmacht* soldier on 10 October 1938 as German forces annexed the German speaking Sudeten districts of Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Munich Conference. It first appeared in the Nazi Party propaganda newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* and since then has constantly been used for both pro and anti-Nazi propaganda. Anti-Nazis, before, during and after the Second World War have manipulated the image to show the crying woman on the right of the picture, cropping out the two other women to paint an idea that this woman has been forced to salute evil, hence her tears. This may not be true. It is doubtful that these tears of sorrow, rather these are more likely to be tears of relief or even joy. When the *Wehrmacht* occupied and annexed the Sudetenland, hundreds of thousands of Sudeten Germans turned out to show their support for the German soldiers and for Adolf Hitler, their Führer, who had returned them to their Fatherland and liberated them from Czech 'oppression'. The Sudeten Germans who disagreed with the annexation stayed away from the public celebrations, therefore making it doubtful whether this woman 'cried in misery' as the caption in the German Federal Archives suggests.

We will never know what this woman's true emotions were on that day in October 1938, whether she cried at the point of a gun or with a garland of flowers. What we must recognise is that her tears have been continuously used as propaganda decades after she first wept in some unknown street in Czechoslovakia.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIOC – Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

CAB – Cabinet Office (United Kingdom)

CSC – Chief of Staff Committee (United Kingdom)

DNSAP – *Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei* – German National Socialist Workers' Party

FO – Foreign Office (United Kingdom)

FS – *Freikorps Sudetenland* – Sudetenland Free Corps

HJ – *Hitlerjugend* – Hitler Youth

HSLŠ – *Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana* – Hlinka Slovak People's Party

MI3 – UK Military Intelligence Section 3 – dealt with Military Intelligence in Europe

NSDAP – *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* – National Socialist German Workers' Party

NSFK – *Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps* – National Socialists Flying Corps

NSKK – *Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* – National Socialist Motor Corps

RAF – Royal Air Force

RAVAG – *Radio-Verkehrs-Aktiengesellschaft* – Radio Communication Company Ltd – Austrian National Radio Broadcaster

RIAF – Royal Iraqi Air Force

RM – *Reichsmark* – German Currency

SA – *Sturmabteilung* – NSDAP Storm Division (Brownshirts)

SHF – *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront* – Front of Sudeten German Homeland

SD – *Sicherheitsdienst* – NSDAP Security Service

SdP – *Sudetendeutsche Partei* – Sudeten German Party

SS – *Schutzstaffel* – NSDAP Protection Squadron (Blackshirts)

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WO – War Office (United Kingdom)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Al-Gaylani, Kamal – Brother of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, Iraqi envoy to Turkey 1941

Al-Gaylani, Rashid Ali – Anti-British Iraqi politician, Prime Minister of Iraq 1940-1941, 1941

Al-Hashimi, Taha – Prime Minister of Iraq 1941

Al-Husseini, Haj Amin – Grand Mufti of Jerusalem 1921-1937

Al-Ilah, Abd – Regent of Iraq 1939-1953, brother of King Ghazi and uncle of King Faisal II

Al-Sabbagh, Salah ad-Din –Iraqi General, Leader of Golden Square, Commander of Iraqi 3rd Division

Al-Said, Nuri – Pro-British Iraqi politician, Prime Minister of Iraq 1938-1941

Al-Saud, Faisal bin Abdulaziz ‘Amir Faisal’ –Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister 1930-1953

Beck, Jozef – Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs 1932-1939

Benes, Eduard – President of Czechoslovakia 1935-1938

Bland, Neville – UK Minister to the Netherlands 1938-1948

Blomberg, Axel von – *Fliegerführer Irak* 1941, son of Werner von Blomberg

Blomberg, Werner von – Commander-in-Chief of the German Armed Forces 1935-1938

Bock, Fedor von – German General

Brandner, Willi – Chief of Staff of the *Freikorps Sudetenland*

Bullard, Reader – British Minister to Iran 1939-1941, British Ambassador to Iran 1941-1946

Burckhardt, Carl – League of Nations High Commissioner for the Free City of Danzig 1937-1939

Carney, William – *New York Times* Correspondent during Spanish Civil War

Cazalet, Victor – UK Member of Parliament

Ciano, Galeazzo – Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs 1936-1943, son-in-law of Benito Mussolini

Chamberlain, Neville – Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1937-1940

Churchill, Winston – Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1940-1945

Chvalovsky, Frantisek – Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs 1938-1939

Cornwallis, Kinahan – UK Ambassador to Iraq 1941-1945

Pawns, Provocateurs and Parasites

Cripps, Stafford – UK Ambassador to the USSR 1940-1942

Dollfuss, Engelbert – Chancellor of Austria 1932-1934

Durcansky, Ferdinand – HSLs propagandist editor of *Natsup*

Eden, Anthony – UK Foreign Secretary 1935-1938, 1940-1945

Faisal, Faisal bin Ghazi bin, King of Iraq 1939-1958, son of King Ghazi

Faisal, Ghazi bin – King of Iraq 1933-1939

Fey, Emil – Vice-Chancellor of Austria 1933-1934, Austrian Interior Minister 1934-1935

Forster, Albert – *Gauleiter* of Danzig 1930-1945, Chief of State of Danzig 1939

Franco, Francisco – Spanish Nationalist Leader during Spanish Civil War

Frank, Karl Hermann – Deputy Leader of the SdP 1935-1938, Secretary of State of Bohemia and Moravia 1939-1945

Glaise-Horstenau, Edmund – Austrian Interior Minister 1936-1939, Vice-Chancellor of Austria 1938

Goring, Hermann – *Luftwaffe* Commander-in-Chief 1935-1945

Greiser, Arthur – President of the Free City of Danzig Senate 1934-1939

Grobba, Fritz – German Minister to Baghdad 1932-1939

Habicht, Theo – Austrian Nazi Leader 1931-1933

Hacha, Emil – President of Czechoslovakia 1938-1939, President of Bohemia and Moravia 1939-1945

Haddad, Uthman Kamal – Private Secretary to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem

Hankey, Maurice – UK Cabinet Secretary 1916-1938

Harvey, Oliver – Anthony Eden's private secretary

Henderson, Nevile – UK Ambassador to Germany 1937-1940

Henlein, Konrad – SdP Founder and Leader 1933-1938

Heydrich, Reinhard – Director of Reich Main Security Office 1939-1942

Himmler, Heinrich – *Reichsführer-SS* 1929-1945

Hitler, Adolf – Chancellor of Germany 1933-1945, *Führer* of Germany 1934-1945

Pawns, Provocateurs and Parasites

Hlinka, Andrej – HSLs Founder and Leader 1918-1938

Hoare, Samuel – UK Foreign Secretary 1935, Home Secretary 1937-1939

Hodza, Milan – Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia 1935-1938

Ibárruri, Dolores – Spanish Republican journalist for *Mundo Obrero* during Spanish Civil War

Ibn Saud, Abdulaziz – Founder and King of Saudi Arabia 1932-1953

Junck, Werner – *Fleigerführer Irak* 1941

Kaltenbrunner, Ernst – Austrian SS Leader 1935-1938, High SS and Police Leader Austria 1938-1943

Kennan, George – US Minister to Czechoslovakia 1938-1940

Kennard, Howard – UK Ambassador to Poland 1937-1939

Kennedy, Aubrey Leo – UK *Times* correspondent

Knatchbull-Hugessen, Hughe – UK Ambassador to Turkey 1939-1944

Knox D'Arcy, William – UK oil magnate

Lampson, Miles – UK Ambassador to Cairo 1936-1946

Leopold, Josef – Austrian Radical Nazi Leader

Lester, Sean – League of Nations High Commissioner to the Free City of Danzig 1933-1936

Mach, Alexander 'Sano' – HSLs propagandist, Hlinka Guard Supreme Commander 1939-1945

Masaryk, Jan – Czechoslovak Ambassador to UK 1925-1938, son of Tomáš Masaryk

Masaryk, Tomáš – President of Czechoslovakia 1918-1935

'Mayr' – Purported German agent in Iraq

Miklas, Wilhelm – President of Austria 1928-1938

Mola, Emilio – Spanish Nationalist General during Spanish Civil War

Mussolini, Benito – *Il Duce* of Fascism 1921-1943, Prime Minister of Italy 1922-1943

Murgas, Karol – Hlinka Guard Chief-of-Staff 1938-1939

Neurath, Konstantin von – German Minister of Foreign Affairs 1932-1938, *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia 1939-1941

Pawns, Provocateurs and Parasites

- Newton, Basil – UK Ambassador to Czechoslovakia 1937-1939, Ambassador to Baghdad 1939-1941
- Pahlavi, Mohammed Reza Shah – Shah of Iran 1941-1979, son of Reza Shah Pahlavi
- Pahlavi, Reza Shah – Iranian War Minister 1921-1923, Prime Minister 1923-1925, Shah of Iran 1925-1941
- Papen, Franz von – German Vice-Chancellor 1933-1934, Ambassador to Austria 1934-1939, Ambassador to Turkey 1939-44
- Phipps, Eric – UK Ambassador to Germany 1933-1937, Ambassador to France 1937-1939
- Pilsudski, Jozef – *de facto* ruler of Poland 1922-1935
- Planetta, Otto – Austrian Nazi, *Standarte*-89 member, murderer of Engelbert Dollfuss
- Pruzinsky, Mikulas – Slovak Economics Minister 1939-1945
- Quisling, Vidkun – Norwegian traitor and collaborator
- Rauschnig, Hermann – President of the Free City of Danzig Senate 1933-1934
- Rintelen, Anton – Austrian Ambassador to Italy 1933-1934
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von – German Ambassador to UK 1936-1938, Foreign Minister 1938-1945
- Röhm, Ernst – SA Founder and Leader 1920-1934
- Rumbold, Horace – UK Ambassador to Germany 1928-1933
- Said, Fahmi – Iraqi General, Golden Square Member, Commander of the RIAF
- Salman, Mahmud – Iraqi General, Golden Square Member, Commander of Iraqi Mechanised Brigade
- Saracoğlu, Şükrü – Turkish Foreign Minister 1938-1942
- Schuschnigg, Kurt von – Austrian Chancellor 1934-1938
- Seyss-Inquart, Arthur – Austrian Nazi Leader, Austrian Chancellor 1938, *Reichstatthalter Ostmark* 1938-1939
- Shabander, Musa – Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs 1941
- Shabib, Jamil – Iraqi General, Golden Square Member, Commander of the Iraqi 1st Division
- Shawkat, Naji – Iraqi Minister of Justice 1941
- Shepherd, Gerald – UK Consul-General to Danzig 1937-1939
- Sidor, Karol – Supreme Commander of the Hlinka Guard 1938-1939 and Deputy Leader of the HSLS

Pawns, Provocateurs and Parasites

Sivak, Jozef – Slovak Minister for Schools 1939-1944

Smart, Harry George – Commander of RAF Habbaniya

Smirnoff, Andre – Soviet Ambassador to Iran 1941-1943

Starhemberg, Ernst Rüdiger – Austrian *Heimwehr* Leader, Austrian Vice-Chancellor 1934-1936

Stalin, Josef – Leader of the USSR 1922-1952

Strang, William – Head of FO Central Department 1937-1939, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Europe 1939-1943

Stonehewer-Bird, Hugh – UK Minister to Saudi Arabia 1940-1943

Tiso, Jozef – HSLC Leader 1938-1945, Autonomous Slovak Prime Minister 1939, Slovak President 1939-1945

Troutbeck, John – UK Consul in Czechoslovakia

Tuka, Vojtech 'Bela' – Founder of Rodobrana, ideological leader of HSLC and Slovak nationalism, Slovak Prime Minister 1939-1945

Vansittart, Robert – UK Permanent Under-Secretary at the FO 1930-1938

Wächter, Otto Gustav – Austrian Radical Nazi Leader

Ward Price, George – UK *Daily Mail* correspondent

Wavell, Archibald – UK Commander-in-Chief Middle East 1939-1941, Commander-in-Chief India 1941-1943

Weizsacker, Ernst von – German Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1938-1943

Wilson, Woodrow – President of the United States of America 1913-1921

Winch, Michael – UK diplomat in Czechoslovakia

Woermann, Ernst – German Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1938-1943

Zehner, Wilhelm – Austrian Defence Minister 1934-1938

INTRODUCTION

“Satellites of the Monster”

A year ago the German fifth column tactics had taken the world by surprise – Norway, Holland, Belgium and France had fallen, largely owing to these new tactics, to this age old weapon of treachery.¹

Every German or Austrian servant, however superficially charming and devoted, is a real and grave menace, and we cannot conclude from our experiences in the last war that ‘the enemy in our midst’ is no more dangerous than it was then. I have not the least doubt that, when the signal is given, as it will scarcely fail to be when Hitler so decides, there will be satellites of the monster *all over the country* who will at once embark on widespread sabotage attacks on civilians and the military indiscriminately.²

The above quotes are by General Sir Archibald Wavell and Sir Neville Bland, the UK Ambassador to Holland. Together these statements provide an accurate summary of how most of the British establishments in the Second World War described the pro-German and pro-Nazi movements and organisations that prepped many European countries for conquest by the *Wehrmacht*. From 1934 to 1941 Hitler sought to first expand the borders of the Third Reich, then the borders of the Nazi Empire; to achieve this objective he used a host of different tactics available to him. Hitler engaged in geopolitical manoeuvrings with Britain and France, he bullied his neighbours with threats of violence, he cultivated alliance with Mussolini’s Italy, he exploited opportunities opened to him by external factors like the Spanish Civil War or the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, he developed a new form of modern fast-moving and seemingly unstoppable warfare in the form of the *blitzkrieg* and he utilised his supporters and sympathisers within other countries to weaken those countries as a prelude to invasion, conquest and annexation. It is these supporters and sympathisers within those other countries that will be the topic of this discourse, the infamous German fifth column movements.

Hitler began using his fifth columns to expand the Reich as early as 1934 with the abortive *Anschluss* of Austria in July of that year, not, as Wavell and many other high officials in the British state asserted, with the opening of the Second World War. This essay will examine how the Third Reich used fifth column movements in Austria in 1934 and 1938, the Sudetenland in 1938, Slovakia

¹ ‘Broadcast on the Second Anniversary of the Declaration of War, September 3, 1941’, A. Wavell, *Speaking Generally: Broadcasts, Orders and Addresses in Time of War (1939-1943)* (London, 1946), pp. 39-45, p. 42.

² Sir Neville Bland to Antony Eden, ‘Fifth Colum Menace’, 14 May 1940. FO 371/25189.

and Danzig in 1939 and Iraq and Iran in 1941 to expand the power and control of the Third Reich over the European continent and the Middle East. This essay will study each movement in turn chronologically. It will explain how these movements differed wildly from one another in their organisation, methodology and resources. Yet they all sought to fulfil a single objective; to weaken their host countries as a prelude to German conquest, absorption or domination. It is the parasitical nature of fifth columns that makes them interesting and provided the motivation for this study, the way they grow inside their hosts like a cancer and eat away at them from within is what makes these movements so alluring. However before one can examine these fifth column movements it is necessary to examine the origins of the term 'fifth column' and accurately define what the phrase means.

'Fifth Column' Origins

General Emilio Mola, a leading Nationalist general in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is accredited with coining the term 'fifth column'. In October 1936 he had surrounded Republican-held Madrid with four columns of infantry and made a radio broadcast stating that a fifth column of Nationalist supporters inside the city would join with his troops as they advanced on Madrid.³ *New York Times* correspondent William P Carney, who reported the civil war from the Nationalist side, sent back a summary of Mola's broadcast to New York and the term 'fifth column' entered the English lexicon and quickly caught on after being popularised by Ernest Hemmingway's play *The Fifth Column* which he wrote in 1938 whilst living in besieged Madrid.⁴ Yale University linguist and Spanish language expert, D.L. Bolinger, described Mola's term as "a witticism on the lips of a Spanish general," and many Republican propagandists described his use of the phrase with the American journalist as a joke.⁵ Either knowingly or unknowingly Mola's term became an effective propaganda weapon; it pricked the ears of journalists, Nationalist supporters and the Republicans inside the Spanish capital, and made the fall of Madrid seem inevitable.⁶ The term 'fifth column' was successful in creating an atmosphere of paranoia, distrust and confusion inside the city. It gave the illusion to the defenders that there was a larger threat from the Nationalists inside Madrid than there actually was, with most reports of fifth column activities in Madrid coming from a terrified and confused population who often mistook Nationalist artillery shells fired into the city with fifth column bombings.⁷ When the Republican propaganda machine called for action against this purported clandestine organisation

³ D. L. Bolinger, 'Fifth Column Marches On', *American Speech*, 19 (1944), pp. 47-49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47, and J. Ruiz, *The 'Red Terror' and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid* (New York, 2014), pp. 186-187.

⁶ N.B. In reality his purported fifth column was a failure and the siege of Madrid dragged on until 1939.

⁷ A. Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1982), p. 133.

inside the capital its definition of what the fifth column was and its activities “remained characteristically vague” as the Republicans desperately tried to pin down an actual definition of the Nationalist Trojan horse.⁸

Mola’s ‘fifth column’ was a throwaway sound-bite, yet it breathed life into an abstract concept, that there were Nationalist supporters inside Madrid waiting to undermine the Republican defenders and open the city up to Mola’s troops. There is no current concrete definition of what a fifth column actually is, with most definitions being too vague, incoherent with one another or often over-simplified. The first attempt by anyone to define Mola’s fifth column perfectly summarises the ambiguous nature of the term and the difficulty in pinning down a precise definition. Dolores Ibárruri wrote in the Republican newspaper *Mundo Obrero* on 3 October 1936 that the fifth column was simply “the one that moved in the darkness”.⁹ The fifth column of Madrid was an indefinable, shadowy, sinister movement that sought to undermine the defence of the city and open the gates to the Nationalists.

General Wavell stated that fifth columns were as much a weapon of warfare as riflemen or tanks and that people like Rahab of Jericho, Delilah of Gaza and Jael the Kenite were all early fifth columnists with the tactic of treachery and internal weakening being used for centuries.¹⁰ As such it is time to provide the term ‘fifth column’ a comprehensive definition that fully encompasses the variety of fifth column movements and how they manifest themselves.

New Definition

I would argue that the term ‘fifth column’ be used as an umbrella term for a series of different organisations and movements that seek to achieve the same goal, that being the weakening of one group to make way for that group’s conquest by another. The term should be applied to groups, organisations and movements that fulfil five key criteria.

First, that a fifth column is the agents of one group (a state, political party, intelligence unit, etc.), which I shall refer to as the ‘sponsor group’, that operate inside another group, which I shall refer to as the ‘host group’. These agents can be supporters, sympathisers or implanted *agent provocateurs* and must operate together in a coordinated and coherent manner. Their organisations or movements can be of any shape or size, be it a small clandestine terrorist cell or an open political party with mass appeal.

Second, these organisations or movements can use any means at their disposal to achieve their objective of undermining the strength of the host group to benefit the sponsor group. These

⁸ Ruiz, *Red Terror*, p. 202.

⁹ Quoted in Ruiz, *Red Terror*, p. 185.

¹⁰ ‘Ruses and Strategies of War, Issued July 1942’, Wavell, *Speaking Generally*, pp. 80-83, p. 82.

tactics and methods can either be legal or illegal, overt or covert, violent or peaceful ranging from political activism, economic sabotage, disseminating propaganda, public disorder, counterintelligence, espionage, terrorism, assassinations and armed insurrections.

Third, fifth columns must gestate over a period of time, operating over several months and even years within their host on behalf of their sponsor. For example, if the sponsor were to attack the host and drop in paratroopers or intelligence operatives just before the initial invasion, or traitors, collaborators and opportunists were to make themselves public to the sponsor group around the time of the invasion, they would not be considered fifth columnists. These groups and individuals operate and manifest themselves in the short term, whereas a fifth column is a long term operation. A notable absence from the case studies of fifth columns in this essay is Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian fascist whose name is now synonymous with treachery. His betrayal of his country was an act of immediate collaboration; he saw an opportunity with Nazi Germany in 1940 and seized it; his treachery did not have the gestation period that my new definition requires for him to be considered a German fifth columnist.¹¹

Fourth, a central authority within the sponsor group must be in contact with its fifth columns inside host groups. This central authority can be a department of state, a branch of military command, an intelligence service or even an organisational wing of a political party. Not only must this central authority be in contact with its fifth columns but it must coordinate their activities so as they can be effectively used in conjunction with other means of expanding the sponsor group's power such as economic, political or military action. The central authority must also sponsor and support its fifth columns. It can do this in a variety of different ways, from providing financial assistance, equipping them with weapons and equipment, sending trained operatives to assist them or externally pressuring the host group to create an environment that allows its fifth columns to operate more effectively against their host.

The fifth and final criteria is that all fifth columns, no matter what methods they use or how they manifest themselves, all work to achieve a single objective; to weaken the host group internally as a prelude to military action, conquest, occupation or annexation by the sponsor group. A Foreign Office memorandum written in May 1940 states that this is the final aim of the German fifth columns:

To do everything to help the German forces to occupy the country in question; actual sabotage on well-ordered military plans; demoralisation and confusion of public opinion and

¹¹ For more on Vidkun Quisling refer to H.F. Dahl, translated by A. Stanton-Ife, *Quisling: A Study in Treachery* (Cambridge, 1999), P.M. Hayes, *Quisling: The Career and Political Ideas of Vidkun Quisling 1887-1945* (Newton Abbot, 1971), O.K. Hoidal, *Quisling: A Study in Treason* (Oxford, 1989).

armed forces with a view to breaking the will of the people to resist; causing panic and confusion in order to make ordered resistance impossible.¹²

I would expand on this early conclusion and argue that a political party undermines the power and effectiveness of a ruling government, or a newspaper that encourages disillusionment or disorder, or a terrorist cell that assassinates a high ranking general or politician; all work to achieve the same objective, to subvert the ability of the host to resist the machinations of the sponsor, rather than this very narrow and inflexible definition initially purported by the Foreign Office.

In this essay the sponsor group is Hitler's Third Reich and the fifth column movements examined over the course of this paper operate within the Austrian Republic, the First and Second Czechoslovak Republics, the Free City of Danzig, the Kingdom of Iraq and the Imperial State of Iran, each serving as hosts to these notorious instruments of Nazi Germany.



Cartoon depicting a German Fifth Column based in South America as a snake preparing to devour the world. 'Uncaptioned', By Sidney 'George' Strube, *The Daily Express*, 7 July, 1941. Source, A Cartoon History of the Middle East, <http://mideastcartoonhistory.com/1941To52/1941to52B.html> Accessed 29 October 2015.

¹² FO Memorandum, 'Fifth Column Activities', 30 May 1940. FO 371/25189.

German fifth columns have so far been encountered in countries where there was a large German minority, or where German influence was powerful, and the people were to a degree German in origin themselves.¹³

In regards to the case studies that will be explored in this essay, the above statement is true. In each scenario Berlin could exercise influence, power and control through the use of her fifth columns. In Austria this was done through the Austrian Nazis, operating initially as a violent network of gangsters and terrorists before evolving into a subversive, shadowy political organisation with a more moderate nationalist face. In Danzig, Hitler's fifth column was a wing of the NSDAP itself, operating openly and unashamedly publicly working to reincorporate the Free City back into the Reich. The SdP presented itself as the indigenous political force of the three and a half million Sudetendeutschen (Sudeten Germans) living in the Sudetenland, while in reality acting as Berlin's puppet inside Czechoslovakia, whereas in Slovakia the HSLC actively placed itself at Germany's disposal to achieve their mutual ambitions. In Iraq a cabal of Pan-Arabist, nationalist, pro-German and anti-British military officers and politicians willingly acted as Germany's fifth column, whilst in Iran a large German immigrant community, and a Shah who was happy to protect them, provided Berlin with a conduit into the heart of the Iranian state.

To place each case in its historical context one needs to examine the aftermath of the First World War and the 1919 Versailles Treaty and the NSDAP's foreign policy in response to Versailles on coming to power. The War saw the defeat and disillusion of the German *Kaiserreich* and the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire, where ethnic Germans (and to a lesser extent Hungarians in the case of Austria-Hungary) held dominion over other ethnic-national groups including Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Slavs and Jews. The victorious Allies carved up the former imperial territories between the previously subjugated nationalities into new nations based on American President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination of peoples. Under this principle each nationality would govern their own sovereign state and would be free from the political, social and economic domination of other nationalities that characterised German and Austro-Hungarian rule. On paper the principle of self-determination of peoples looked set to work, until the victors at Versailles came to creating workable nation-states in Eastern and Central Europe, where the principle of self-determination of peoples had to compromise with more physical and realistic factors such as lobbying by the representatives of the nationalities whose states they were trying to

¹³ FO Memorandum, 'Fifth Column Activities', 30 May 1940. FO 371/25189.

create, geographical boundaries, leaving these new states with workable economies and administrative institutions, and President Wilson's principle that all nations should have access to the sea and the very real fear of the victors that Germany could once again become a threat to European peace.

Nazi Ideology

Germans became the largest minority population in Europe with over 7.2 million Germans scattered throughout Central and Eastern Europe, leaving Germany and Austria as the only German-majority countries as a result of the Versailles compromises.¹⁴ Nazi ideology began to label the Germans of the Reich the *Reichsdeutsche* and the German minorities scattered through Eastern and Central Europe as the *Auslandsdeutschen* (Foreign Germans). Many of them who had been part of the ruling class in the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, now found themselves ruled, and in some cases oppressed, by the nationalities they used to rule over.¹⁵ It was from these *Auslandsdeutschen* that Germany's European fifth columns were to draw their strength and supporters in what Sir Nevile Henderson called "the advance-guard for a political invasion by their Fatherland."¹⁶

Versailles stripped Germany of over 13 percent of her territory and 10 percent of her population which to the Nazis was a violation of German honour and they argued against the principle of self-determination. However Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, noted, only 3 percent of Germany's lost populace were German-speakers.¹⁷ In response to this perceived injustice and slight of national honour the Nazis adopted the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community) as a cornerstone of their ideology and foreign policy, where they would bring the *Deutschesvolk* (German people) into a single state based on a shared linguistic, racial and national identity of Germanness. This pan-German idea hinged on the notion that ethnic Germans owed their allegiance to the *Deutschesvolk* and not to the individual states that they were citizens of, in what Smelser calls *Volkstumspolitik* (ethnic German politics) which he defines as "an intense concern for the welfare of ethnic German groups and an attempt to foster close ties between these groups and the Reich German population through social, economic and cultural assistance."¹⁸

To create this Greater Germany, the fifth columns would be employed in a process of *Gleichschaltung*, which has no direct translation into English, but has been defined as a process of

¹⁴ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London, 2009), p.33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁶ N. Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-1939* (London, 1940), p.60.

¹⁷ R. Vansittart, *The Mist Procession: The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London, 1958), p.222.

¹⁸ R.M. Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem: Volkstumspolitik and the Formation of Nazi Foreign Policy* (Folkestone, 1975), p.5.

‘satellisation’ by Kindermann and a period of ‘coordination/bringing into line/making the same’ by Low.¹⁹ Whereby the fifth columns would engage in the political discourse of the states they lived in and synchronise their political and economic structures with that of the Reich. The importance the Nazis placed on their fifth columns to achieve *Volksgemeinschaft* can be exemplified in the creation of two separate rival organisations to coordinate the *Auslandsdeutschen* – the *Volkdeutscher Rat* (Ethnic German Council) as part of the German Foreign Ministry and the *Auslands Organisation* (Foreign Organisation) as a department of the NSDAP – each tasked with maintaining communications with *Auslandsdeutschen* all over the world and competing with one another for power and funds.²⁰

The final pillar of Nazi ideology one needs to understand is the *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle), that the word of the Führer was law and an individual’s relationship with the Führer determined their position within the Nazi hierarchy and their power. Put simply, the closer one was to Hitler the more power they had within the NSDAP and the state. In regards to foreign policy and fifth columns the effect of the *Führerprinzip* was two-fold. Firstly, foreign policy could change dramatically at Hitler’s will, with Smelser arguing that the Nazis didn’t have an official policy because of this.²¹ Secondly, because the leadership of a fifth column would be dependent on who enjoyed Hitler’s favour and its *modus operandi* on what sort of person that leader was, whether they were ruthless fanatics or sombre statesmen, and the objectives Hitler wanted that movement to achieve. Due to this ever changing characteristic of Hitler’s rule it can be difficult to pin down an exact and concrete foreign agenda. However a report by UK Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden to the Cabinet in 1936 provides an accurate conclusion over Germany’s foreign intentions:

Hitler’s foreign policy may be summed up as the destruction of the [Versailles] peace settlement as re-establishment of Germany as the dominant power in Europe. The means by which this policy is to be effected are two-fold: (a) Internally through the militarisation of the whole nation in all its aspects; (b) externally by economic and territorial expansion so as to absorb as far as possible all those of German race who are at present citizens of neighbouring States, to acquire new markets for German industry and new fields for German emigration, and to obtain control of some of the sources of raw materials at present lacking

¹⁹ G. Kindermann, translated by S. Brough and D. Taylor, *Hitler’s Defeat in Austria 1933-1934: Europe’s First Containment of Nazi Expansionism* (London, 1988), pp.xvi-xvii, and A.D. Low, *The Anschluss Movement, 1931-1938, and the Great Powers* (New York, 1985), p.126.

²⁰ Smelser, *Volkstumspolitik*, pp.23-24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

in Germany. The form and direction of this expansion is the one still doubtful factor in Germany's plans for the future.²²

Fifth columns would become a vital asset for Hitler's expansionist ambitions.

Austria, Danzig, Czechoslovakia, Iraq and Iran

Austria could probably be described as the least-controversial child born of Versailles. As one of the constituent nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire it lost its continental holdings, reducing Austria to two-thirds of her German-speaking territories.²³ Despite sharing a common German ethnicity, language and culture with Austria, Germany was forbidden from uniting with her under Article 80 of the Versailles Treaty, so that a united Greater Germany could not pose a threat to the future stability of Europe.²⁴ This was further enforced by Article 88 of the Treaty of St Germain which banned Austria from seeking political and economic union with Germany.²⁵ Despite this seemingly valid reasoning on the part of the victors to keep Germany and Austria separate, the Nazis made it their first and foremost goal in terms of foreign policy. In the second paragraph of the first page of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler, an Austrian by birth who became a German citizen in 1932, called for the *Anschluss* (union) of his former homeland and his adopted one, stating:

German-Austria must be restored to the great German Motherland. And not indeed on any grounds of economic calculation whatsoever...Even if the union were a matter of economic indifference, and even if it were to be disadvantageous from the economic standpoint, still ought to take place. People of the same blood should be in the same Reich.²⁶

For Hitler, the *Anschluss* of Germany and Austria into a single Greater German Reich was an ideological mission. In official publications and speeches the Nazis consistently refer to Austria as *Deutschösterreich*, German-Austria, highlighting the importance they placed on this idea of a Greater Germany forged through *Anschluss*. It was on this principle of *Volksgemeinschaft* that they coordinated their fifth column inside Austria to weaken and cripple the Republic and prepare it for absorption in March 1938.

²² A. Eden, 'The German Danger: A Collection of reports from His Majesty's Embassy at Berlin between the accession of Herr Hitler to power in the spring of 1933 and the end of 1935', 17 January 1936. CAB 24/259/13.

²³ Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, p.230.

²⁴ Sir John Simon, 'Austria', 22 January 1934. CAB 24/247/19.

²⁵ Lord Halifax, 'Austria and Czechoslovakia', 12 March 1934. CAB 24/275/31.

²⁶ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Mumbai, 2011), p.16.

Danzig was created out of a paradox at Versailles, where Wilson's principle of self-determination came into direct conflict with the principle that Poland should have access to the sea. On the Baltic coast Danzig was the only harbour that allowed Polish access to the sea, yet 90 per cent of the city's population was German.²⁷ Articles 100 to 108 of the Versailles Treaty laid out the compromises of the creation of the Free City of Danzig, where the newly created League of Nations (the forerunner of the modern United Nations) would guarantee the city's independence from either German or Polish interference in its internal affairs. However it would be within the Polish Customs Area where Poland would control the communications system, harbour and conduct the city's foreign relations. Article 5 of the 1922 Danzig Constitution further clarified its status as a Free City by promising that Danzig would not construct fortifications, manufacture munitions, serve as a military or naval base nor raise a standing army, therefore demilitarising the city and placing its protection in the hands of the League.²⁸ Despite the efforts to ensure Danzig satisfied Polish demands for sea access the city, whilst remaining free of Polish and German interference, remained, as one of the authors of Versailles put it, "unquestionably German".²⁹ The creation of the Free City, and the Polish Corridor – which divided East Prussia from the German heartlands – out of the old *Kaiserreich* was described by Sir Maurice Hankey, the British Cabinet Secretary, in 1933 as "galling to the German pride, looks bad on a map, and has never received Germany's moral ascent."³⁰ It would be on these issues that the Nazi fifth column coalesced and justified their mission to reincorporate Danzig into the Reich.

Czechoslovakia was created out of the provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, which were mainly populated by Czechs, and the provinces of Slovakia of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However the new state was not home to just Czechs and Slovaks but also ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Poles and Jews. Where the Czechs constituted just over 51 percent of the total population of approximately 14 million yet they dominated the state at every level, in politics, administration, economics, finance, the military and education.³¹ A contentious issue that would antagonise both the ethnic Germans living in the Sudetenland region of Bohemia and Moravia, the *Sudetendeutschen*, and the Slovaks in the east, and corral them into becoming Berlin's pawns. The Versailles Committee justified the inclusion of the 3.5 million *Sudetendeutsche* into Czechoslovakia on geographical and strategic grounds, arguing:

²⁷ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

²⁸ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

²⁹ Quoted in H.S. Levine, *Hitler's Free City: A History of the Nazi Party in Danzig, 1925-1939* (Chicago, 1973), p.9.

³⁰ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

³¹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 11 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

Bohemia forms a natural region, clearly defined by its fringe of [Sudetes] mountains. The mere fact that a German population has established itself in the outlying districts at a relatively recent date did not appear to the committee a sufficient reason for depriving Bohemia of her natural frontiers... These regions (i.e. reasons of national security) depend on geographical considerations. The chain of mountains which surrounds Bohemia constitutes a line of defence for the country. To take away this line of mountains would place Bohemia at the mercy of Germany.³²

The result of this decision was to leave the *Sudetendeutsche* the single largest ethnic minority group in Europe.³³ This was made all the more galling for them considering that the Slovaks, agrarian peasants with little education and a smaller population of 2.2 million, were given greater prominence than the once-ruling Germans in *Czechoslovakia*.³⁴ *Times* correspondent Aubrey Leo Kennedy even noted that, "it has from the first been 'The Czechoslovak State' – never any question of a 'Czechodeutsch State'."³⁵

At Versailles the Slovaks had three options open to them. The first was outright independence, but considering that the population were mainly uneducated peasants and "almost totally lacking an intelligentsia" this was not a viable option.³⁶ Second, federation within Austria-Hungary, which was an equally unviable and unpopular choice. The only workable scenario was union with the more educated Czechs who had the administrative, economic and technical knowledge to govern a functioning state.³⁷ The idea was that the "politically more mature" and educated Czechs would administer Slovakia and bring the Slovaks to a standard where they could jointly administer the entire state in future.³⁸ However a partnership of two equal parts the new Czechoslovak State was not to be; the Czechs alienated the Slovaks just as much as they alienated the *Sudetendeutschen* which was accurately summarised by one British contemporary:

When the Slovaks, it will be recalled, broke away from Hungarian rule, in 1918 and decided to make common cause with the Czechs, who were fellow Slavs, they were promised a large measure of freedom. But after the organisation of the new state the Czechs developed into

³² Quotes in UK Legation Prague to FO, 16 May 1938. FO 371/21720.

³³ Smelser, *Volkstumspolitik*, p.10.

³⁴ UK Legation Prague to FO, 11 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

³⁵ A.L. Kennedy Report to FO, 'The Problem of Czechoslovakia', 5 April 1939. FO 371/21716.

³⁶ G.F. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton, 1968), 'Report on the conditions in Slovakia' January 1939, pp.14-27, p.14.

³⁷ D.H. El Mallakh, *The Slovak Autonomy Movement, 1935-1939: A Study in Unrelenting Nationalism* (New York, 1979), p.29.

³⁸ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Report on Conditions in Slovakia', p.14.

something of imperialists. At home they dominated not only the real minorities but also the Slovaks.³⁹

The new Czech-dominated state antagonised both *Sudetendeutschen* and Slovaks. The rise to power of the Nazis in Germany provided both groups with a generous and sympathetic sponsor, who shared their ambition of a dissolved Czechoslovakia, albeit for ulterior motives. Led by the SdP and HSLS, respectively, Hitler had two “willing pawns”, who would act as his fifth column and bring about the ruination of Czechoslovakia and consolidate his hold on Central Europe.⁴⁰

The principle of self-determination is one that applied to Europeans, not the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire whereby the Ottoman provinces were divided between the British and French Empires as League of Nations mandates with Iraq coming under the dominion of the British Empire.⁴¹ In 1930 Britain’s formal mandate over Iraq ceased with the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and Iraq became a nominally independent Kingdom. However Britain still maintained indirect control over the country and was allowed to take control over Iraq’s communication and transportation systems when required and maintained two RAF bases, one at Habbaniya near Baghdad and the other at Shaiba near Basra.⁴² The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty infuriated nationalists and Pan-Arabists, who dreamed of creating a single Arab state. It was on this issue that an anti-British movement coalesced and provided Germany with her fifth column.

Germany’s fifth column was a clique of military officers in command of the Iraqi Army led by four generals, who termed themselves the Golden Square, who were supported by an anti-British faction within the Iraqi parliament and the Pan-Arabist Grand Mufti (Islamic religious scholar) of Jerusalem who had incited the Arab Revolt (1936-1939) in Palestine against British rule.⁴³ This anti-British coalition sought Germany’s assistance in supplanting the pro-British (and some would say puppet) government and Berlin was prepared to oblige them (to what extent will be discussed in CHAPTER V). It is important to remember that the case of the fifth column in Iraq, and later Iran, occurred within the context of the Second World War, whilst the European fifth columns take place in the context leading up to the outbreak of hostilities. Traditional German foreign policy, Nazi ideology, the demands of wartime, the geographical distance and British determination not to lose control of Iraq; all influence how Germany and the Iraqi fifth column cooperated and coordinated

³⁹ Mr Michael Winch, Communicated to FO, 16 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

⁴⁰ Kennan, *Prague after Munich*, p.xv.

⁴¹ For further reading on Britain, France and the division of the Ottoman Empire refer to J. Barr, *Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East* (London, 2011).

⁴² G. Warner, *Iraq and Syria 1941* (Cranbury, 1979), p.14.

⁴³ M. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941* (London, 1982), pp.164-169.

against the British, with Germany lacking the open hand in the Middle East that she had enjoyed in Europe.

Iran (or Persia as it was known until 1935) is the only host country examined in this essay that was not born out of the First World War and the Versailles Treaties. Persia had long been an independent nation and stayed neutral during the First World War; however it had traditionally been divided between two spheres of influence, the Russian Empire to the north and the British Empire in India to the south-east, where they both competed for influence over the country.⁴⁴ On ascending the throne in 1926 the Shah (King) of Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi a brutal and greedy ruler by all accounts, attempted to dilute British and now Soviet influence in Iran by engaging with Nazi Germany, whose distinct anti-Communist, and to an extent anti-British, both impressed and courted him.⁴⁵

Under Reza Shah's protection a large German immigrant community, numbering approximately 3000 men, women and children, flourished in Iran.⁴⁶ They occupied key positions in Iran's economy, communications, infrastructure, finance, army and civil administration which the British saw as a credible threat to their influence in Iran and the wider war effort. The British argued this German community was a fifth column that wielded huge influence in Iran and was preparing to act against British interests and facilitate German penetration into the Middle East:

There can indeed be no doubt, in the view of what has happened in many other countries, that these persons will be employed, whenever it may seem to the German Government that the appropriate moment has arrived, to create disorder, either in Iran herself or in neighbouring countries, with a view to assist the execution of Germany's military plans.⁴⁷

As with Iraq, Iran and the German fifth column fall within the paradigm of the Second World War and face the same restraining factors as the fifth column in Iraq.

This essay will examine each fifth column movement in turn, exploring how the movements were formed, how they were organised, their *modus operandi*, how they were used by Germany and how the British understood them. The fifth columns cited in this essay are by no means the only fifth

⁴⁴ A. Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton, 1980), p.18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁴⁶ FO to Washington DC Embassy, 20 August 1941, FO 371/27201.

⁴⁷ Joint Anglo-Soviet Memorandum to Iranian Government, 9 August 1941, FO 371/27200.

columns that the Nazis utilised before and during the Second World War.⁴⁸ The case studies chosen are merely the most notable, and, in my opinion, the most interesting examples of German fifth column movements. The aim of this discourse is to explore the nature of fifth columns as a tool of diplomacy and a weapon of war within the context of Nazi expansionism, to examine common characteristics and the differences between them and how Britain tried to understand these pawns, provocateurs and parasites of the Third Reich.



'Adolf Hitler parading in Vienna in occupied Austria, 14 March 1938'. Source, German Federal Archive Bild 146-1972-028-14. Accessed via the World War II Database http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=8349 Accessed 29 October 2015.

⁴⁸ N.B. Germany utilised fifth column amongst the German populations of Poland, the USSR, Denmark and Holland and there are numerous reports of German fifth columns across the globe from UK, Turkey, Argentina and the USA.

CHAPTER I – AUSTRIA

“Now we are the hammer”

We have been the anvil long enough ... Now we are the hammer.⁴⁹

Declared Hermann Goering in a speech on 8 April 1938 describing the *Anschluss*; this marked the first successful use of a fifth column by the Nazis. The fifth column had been slowly gestating since 1931, before the Nazis assume power in Berlin in 1933. During the seven years that it was active it evolved from a small underground terrorist organisation into a shadowy political force that operated under the guise of Austrian nationalism. The impetus of this evolution was the failed putsch of 25 July 1934 where the Austrian Nazis assassinated the Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. However, due to a variety of factors which will be discussed later, they failed to capitalise on this and seize total control of the Austrian Government. This chapter will examine the Austrian fifth column in five parts: Firstly, the Dollfuss regime from 1933 until his murder; his alliance with the Fascist *Heimwehr* (Home Guard) and Mussolini’s Italy and relations with the Austrian NSDAP. Secondly the July Putsch of 1934; the Nazi operation, Berlin’s involvement, Nazi failures and the reactions of the *Heimwehr* and Mussolini. Thirdly the changing international context in the wake of Dollfuss’ assassination and the ascension of Kurt von Schuschnigg to Chancellor. Mussolini’s decision to invade Abyssinia (Ethiopia) upset the balance of Schuschnigg’s regime, damaged relations with the *Heimwehr* and saw Austria’s foreign allies abandon her as they squabbled between themselves. Fourthly, the reorganisation of the Austrian Nazis into Austrian Nationalists, their more sophisticated operation, the July 1936 Austro-German Agreement and the planned plebiscite of March 1938. Finally, the *Anschluss* with Austria in March 1938, its direct causes and how the fifth column facilitated Germany’s invasion and absorption.

The Vaterländische Front

On 7 March 1933 Chancellor Dollfuss, the leader of the Christian Socialist Party, instituted a semi-dictatorial regime after the Austrian Parliament dissolved itself over a voting technicality. However he lacked the necessary support to consolidate his rule and turned to the pro-Italian fascist *Heimwehr*, and its political wing, the *Heimatabloc*, led by Prince Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, for assistance.⁵⁰ With the support of the Vienna *Heimwehr* leader and Vice-Chancellor, Major Emil Fey, Starhemberg and Dollfuss formed a “dictatorial triumvirate” that was able to resist the Nazis and

⁴⁹ Quoted in UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 9 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

⁵⁰ MI3 Report, ‘Note on the Situation in Austria’, 30 October 1933. WO 190/210.

rule Austria.⁵¹ Both Dollfuss and Starhemberg opposed union with Germany and enjoyed the support of Mussolini, who provided them with finances, weapons and equipment, including 50,000 rifles and 200 machine guns, to defend against both the Austrian Nazis and the *Schutzbund*, the militant wing of the Socialist Party.⁵² Dollfuss visited Mussolini in April 1933 to seal the alliance between Austria and Italy. Both men were threatened by the new Nazi regime in Berlin and its pan-German ideology.⁵³ Mussolini ruled over German-speakers in the northern province of South Tyrol, which Italy had gained from Austria-Hungary in the Treaty of Saint-Germain with a population of 250,000 Germans.⁵⁴ Mussolini feared that if Hitler annexed Austria he would turn his gaze towards Italy and the German areas of Czechoslovakia and supplant Italy as the dominant power in the Danube Basin.⁵⁵ Therefore Mussolini had a vested interest in keeping Dollfuss in power and Austria independent, and in return Dollfuss could rely on Italian support against the 100,000 strong German Army⁵⁶ as the Austrian Army was under-equipped and under-manned at 8,000 men.⁵⁷ With the support of Mussolini and the *Heimwehr* in May 1933 Dollfuss created the *Vaterländische Front* (Fatherland Front) as a fascist umbrella organisation that would be above party politics and would have the *Heimwehr* as its militant wing.⁵⁸

Italian support for Dollfuss was conditional on a crackdown on the activities of the Austrian NSDAP, which had been becoming increasingly violent and aggressive since the ascension of Hitler to power in Berlin, and hoped to repeat the tactics he used in Germany to sweep to power in Austria.⁵⁹ The *Gauleiter* of the Austrian Nazis was Theo Habicht, a *Reichsdeutsche* sent by Hitler in 1931, who Starhemberg described as “an important part in the Nazi terrorist wave and in organising the various crimes committed by the Nazis against Austria,” and by Schuschnigg as “the chief planner”.⁶⁰ Habicht oversaw a campaign of bombings of government offices, railways, bridges and public places and the shooting of government officials.⁶¹ Low describes the initial Nazi tactics as “propaganda, terror and general lawlessness”.⁶² Dollfuss responded and expelled 1,143 Austrians and Germans connected

⁵¹ C.E. Edmondson, *The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics 1918-1936* (Athens Georgia, 1978), p.183.

⁵² J. Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss 1931-1938* (London, 1963), p.48.

⁵³ Low, *The Anschluss Movement*, p.133.

⁵⁴ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p.230.

⁵⁵ Vansittart Report, ‘Austria’, 30 August 1933, in Sir John Simon Report, ‘Austria’, 22 January 1934. CAB 24/247/19.

⁵⁶ N.B. The Treaty of Versailles limited the German Army to 100,000 men.

⁵⁷ MI3 Report, ‘Note on the Situation in Austria’.

⁵⁸ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.51.

⁵⁹ MI3 Report, ‘Note on the Situation in Austria’ and Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.147.

⁶⁰ E.R. Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini* (London, 1942), p.72, and K. von Schuschnigg, translated by R. Barry, *The Brutal Takeover: The Austrian ex-Chancellor’s account of the Anschluss of Austria by Hitler* (London, 1971), p.98.

⁶¹ Kindermann, *Hitler’s Defeat in Austria*, pp.34-35.

⁶² Low, *The Anschluss Movement*, p.119.

with the NSDAP, including Habicht, on 13 June 1933.⁶³ The final straw came on 19 June after the Nazis bombed a group of police auxiliaries in Krems, killing one and injuring several others, prompting Fey to immediately declare the disillusion of the Austrian NSDAP without consulting his cabinet colleagues, making Austria the first country to ban the National Socialist German Workers Party.⁶⁴

Fey's banning of the Austrian NSDAP had a fourfold effect. Firstly, it became apparent to the Nazis that they couldn't simply repeat the methods used to seize power in Germany. Instead it was going to require a more intelligent and sophisticated campaign against Dollfuss' government. Fulfilling the role of the sponsor group, Berlin organised for German planes to drop propaganda leaflets over Austria encouraging people to refuse to pay taxes and withdraw their money from banks. However these were quickly stopped after protests from London, Paris and Rome.⁶⁵ Nazis set up loudspeakers on the Bavarian-Austrian border and broadcast propaganda messages into Austria, Habicht launched a radio campaign from his new base in Munich and propaganda leaflets were surreptitiously left in Austrian letterboxes.⁶⁶ This activity came in conjunction with a strategy of economic strangulation; Hitler planned to starve Dollfuss of the German tourist revenue, which he was heavily reliant on, by implementing a visa fee of 1000 RM on any German who wished to visit Austria.⁶⁷ The effect of the 1000 Mark Blockade was felt immediately, in July 1932 98,000 Germans visited Austria; in July 1933 the figure was reduced to only 8 individuals; from 1933-1934 only 70,718 Germans entered Austria compared to the 750,000 who visited in 1931-1932.⁶⁸ Hitler compounded this with the banning of all Austrian timber, fruit and cattle imports, another lucrative source of revenue for Dollfuss.⁶⁹ This economic and propaganda war was conducted in conjunction with a more precise and effective terrorist campaign designed to scare off tourists and discredit Dollfuss' regime. By February 1934 there were approximately 40 bombings a day throughout Austria, with the explosives smuggled over the border from Germany.⁷⁰ Secondly, the Nazis created the Austrian Legion in Bavaria out of the Austrian Nazis who had been expelled or fled from Austria. The Legion was a detachment of the SA numbering between 18,000 and 25,000 individuals. They were given military training and equipment; their purpose was to cross into Austria to carry out a more surgical and ruthless terror campaign, disseminate propaganda, and act as reinforcements to an uprising

⁶³ B.F. Pauley, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis: A History of Austrian National Socialism* (London, 1981), pp.107-108.

⁶⁴ Edmondson, *Heimwehr*, p.192.

⁶⁵ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.114-115.

⁶⁷ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.57.

⁶⁸ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.112.

⁶⁹ Kindermann, *Hitler's Defeat in Austria*, p.94.

⁷⁰ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.107.

inside Austria by Nazis who went underground instead of fleeing.⁷¹ Kindermann called them “professional revolutionaries” and they are a perfect example of how fifth column organisations can be utilised by the sponsor group against the host.⁷² Thirdly, Dollfuss’ regime was increasingly reliant on Starhemberg and Mussolini for support, the *Heimwehr* supplanted the Austrian Army in all but name and much depended on the personal relationship between Dollfuss and Starhemberg (and by extension Mussolini), something that would save Austria in 1934 but would ultimately be its undoing by 1938. Finally the remaining Austrian Nazis became radicalised, as more moderate voices who advocated a gentler more subversive approach had fled to Germany. These radicals were headed by Doctor Anton Rintelen, the Austrian Minister to Rome, Captain Josef Leopold, the only *Gauleiter* not to flee Austria when the NSDAP was banned, and Otto Gustav Wächter, who advocated an immediate violent uprising against the Dollfuss regime before the *Heimwehr* crushed the remaining Nazis.⁷³

July 1934 Putsch

Despite Berlin’s terrorist, economic and propaganda campaigns against Austria, Dollfuss’ regime held firm; a *Schutzbund* uprising from 12-16 February 1934 was brutally suppressed by the Austrian Army with the invaluable support of the *Heimwehr*.⁷⁴ On 17 February Britain, France and Italy declared their support for Austrian independence and on 17 March Dollfuss and Mussolini signed the Rome Protocols whereby Italy guaranteed their declaration.⁷⁵ The Nazis had lost the momentum in Austria. Dollfuss had powerful friends at home and abroad who would protect Austria and with the Austrian NSDAP leadership exiled in Germany the remaining Nazis lacked any clear leadership and followed their own policies. Pauley summarises that they were spiritually, not politically, loyal to the Hitler regime.⁷⁶ However a struggle for power and the soul of Nazism inside Germany between Ernst Röhm, the SA leader, and Hitler would provide a new impetus for the Austrian Nazis.

On coming to power in 1933 Hitler sought to court the *Reichswehr* (German Military) and the German conservative elite. However Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA (Brownshirts), believed that now the National Revolution had been achieved there needed to be a second Socialist Revolution to create a genuine National Socialist State. By 1934 Röhm had turned the SA into a

⁷¹ MI3 Report, ‘Note on the Situation in Austria’.

⁷² Kindermann, *Hitler’s Defeat in Austria*, p.15.

⁷³ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.98, and Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.174, and Kindermann, *Hitler’s Defeat in Austria*, p.98.

⁷⁴ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.81, and Edmondson, *Heimwehr*, pp.219-220.

⁷⁵ Lord Halifax, ‘Austria and Czechoslovakia’, 12 March 1938. CAB 24/275/31. And Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.108.

⁷⁶ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.137.

street army of 3 million men and yearned to replace the *Reichswehr* as the official German Army.⁷⁷ With the backing of the *Reichswehr* and the “less dirty, more cruel” SS (Blackshirts), Hitler purged the SA on 30 June and Röhm was summarily executed on 1 July in the Night of the Long Knives after declining the opportunity to commit suicide.⁷⁸ The effect of the massacre was to consolidate Hitler’s grip on Germany, as the *Reichswehr* had thrown their support behind him, the SS, under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, rose in prominence and the SA was reorganised into a political organisation instead of a political army.⁷⁹ The massacre also galvanised the Austrian Nazis; the Night of the Long Knives with its quick resort to sudden extreme violence and its quick success gave the Austrian Nazis a working model on which to base a putsch against the Dollfuss Government.⁸⁰

The putsch of 25 July 1934 was planned as a lightning strike against the Austrian Government in Vienna, which would incapacitate the regime’s ability to coordinate a response to mass Nazi uprisings throughout the provinces. The shock troops of the putsch were to be the SS *Standarte-89*, consisting of ex-soldiers who had been purged from the Austrian Army for their membership of the NSDAP, and were part of the Austrian Legion in Bavaria.⁸¹ Two targets in Vienna were chosen, the Austrian Chancellery Building and national radio station, RAVAG.⁸² On 25 July 154 *Standarte-89* men in Austrian police and army uniforms stormed the Chancellery and seized Dollfuss and most of the Government hostage. However Defence Minister and Army Chief, General Wilhelm Zehner, and Education Minister Kurt von Schuschnigg managed to escape and elude capture, allowing the regime to maintain its hold on Austria.⁸³ 15 *Standarte-89* men also captured RAVAG and broadcast *one* message that Dollfuss had resigned and President Wilhelm Miklas had asked for Rintelen to form a new government. After the single broadcast they played music, there was no supporting broadcast from Germany and the Austrian police quickly retook RAVAG.⁸⁴ Starhemberg was in Venice at the time of the putsch and issued the following order to the *Heimwehr* when he discovered the Nazis had seized Dollfuss:

⁷⁷ W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Volume I, The Gathering Storm* (London, 1948), p.76, and UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 5 July 1934, in A. Eden, ‘The German Danger: A Collection of Reports from His Majesty’s Embassy at Berlin between the accession of Herr Hitler to power in the spring of 1933 and the end of 1935’, 17 January 1936. CAB 24/259/13.

⁷⁸ Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, p.378.

⁷⁹ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 5 July 1934, in A. Eden, ‘The German Danger’.

⁸⁰ Low, *The Anschluss Movement*, p.126.

⁸¹ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.97.

⁸² Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.131.

⁸³ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.98, and Low, *The Anschluss Movement*, p.159.

⁸⁴ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.97, Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.131, and Kindermann, *Hitler’s Defeat in Austria*, pp.103-104.

The entire *Heimatschutz* is to be called up and be ready for any emergency. Wherever the Nazis take action they are to be attacked immediately.⁸⁵

The Austrian police and army bore the brunt of the fighting in the provinces. However the *Heimwehr* played an integral part in combatting the Nazis in Vienna and suppressing the insurrection.⁸⁶ Under Starhemberg's leadership, and with his personal financing, the Heimwehr could boast over 50,000 trained and well-equipped men and were invaluable support for the Austrian security forces.⁸⁷ In support of his friend Dollfuss, Mussolini mobilised the Alpine Corps and sent 30,000 troops to the Brenner Pass on the Austro-Italian border as a warning to Hitler not to intervene on the side of the Austrian Nazis. Mussolini sent Starhemberg a telegram saying:

The independence of Austria is a principle for which Italy has fought and for which she will continue to fight with even greater determination in more difficult days.⁸⁸

With the *Heimwehr* forces closing in and German reinforcements warded off by the threat of Italian intervention the putsch had failed, Dollfuss himself was shot by *Standarte-89* man, Otto Planetta, whereupon he bled to death and Berlin quickly disowned the Austrian Nazis.⁸⁹ After a furious Mussolini declared "Hitler is the murderer of Dollfuss" he sent further reinforcements with heavy artillery to the Brenner Pass.⁹⁰ Even after the Vienna putsch had failed Nazi revolts erupted in the provinces but were quickly crushed by *Heimwehr* and Army troops; the Austrian Legion remained stationary in Bavaria and inside Austria the SA and SS refused to assist one another after the political fallout from the Night of the Long Knives.⁹¹ On 27 July Berlin denounced the Austrian Nazis as extremist SA men angry at the Röhm purge and denied any contact or knowledge of the putsch.⁹²

By 28 July the revolt had been quashed and Schuschnigg was appointed Chancellor by Miklas with Starhemberg as his deputy.⁹³ The two men had a difficult relationship. When Miklas presided over negotiations between the two to form a new government Schuschnigg was given command of

⁸⁵ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.152.

⁸⁶ Edmondson, *Heimwehr*, p.242.

⁸⁷ M. Bullock, *Austria 1918-1938: A Study in Failure* (London, 1939), p.186.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, pp.167-168.

⁸⁹ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, pp.113-114.

⁹⁰ Gehl, *Austria, Germany and the Anschluss*, p.99.

⁹¹ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, pp.132-133.

⁹² Bullock, *Study in Failure*, p.268, and Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.164.

⁹³ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.115.

the army whereas Starhemberg was in control of the police, symbolising the rebalance of power in Austria after Dollfuss' murder.⁹⁴

In his diary Sir Eric Phipps, the UK Ambassador to Berlin, said that Hitler's failure in Austria was down to the "hostility of foreign countries", principally Italy. It would be the neutralisation of this Italian hostility due to Mussolini's imperial ambitions that was to be Austria's doom.⁹⁵

Changing International Context

On 27 September 1934 Britain, France and Italy reaffirmed their February commitment to Austrian independence which then formed the centrepiece of the 14 April 1935 Stresa Front between them with the aim of curtailing Hitler's imperial ambitions.⁹⁶ Phipps described the Pact as:

The high water mark in the affairs of the Powers whose hope it is to contain Germany. But, as a result of the Ethiopian tensions, these refreshing waters soon receded, and now we can only regretfully look up at the distant white line.⁹⁷

Schuschnigg's new, and deeply unpopular regime relied exclusively upon Italian and *Heimwehr* support for survival and Mussolini's Abyssinian adventure was set to torpedo the foundations of the Austrian regime. Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia) on 3 October 1935, with the use of superior weapons, aeroplanes and chemical warfare Italy quickly conquered the country by 5 May 1936, adding it to their Empire.⁹⁸ The Second Italo-Abyssinian War had both internal and external consequences for Schuschnigg's regime. Internally, it fractured the *Vaterländische Front* between Starhemberg, who wanted closer ties with Italy, and Schuschnigg, who "never expressed friendship for Italy with quite the warmth that Dollfuss had" and preferred reconciliation with Germany.⁹⁹ Their relationship was strained after Mussolini effectively told Austria in March 1936 that his commitments in Abyssinia meant he could not intervene with Germany on Austria's behalf.¹⁰⁰ In what Low called a "last desperate attempt to gain Mussolini's favour" Starhemberg sent him a congratulatory telegram after Italian troops captured the Abyssinian capital of Addis Ababa, cementing the Italian conquest.¹⁰¹ Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia had been seen as an act of naked

⁹⁴ Edmondson, *Heimwehr*, p.243.

⁹⁵ '3 January 1935 Entry', G. Johnson (ed.), *Our Man in Berlin: The Diary of Sir Eric Phipps, 1933-1937* (Basingstoke, 2008), p.81.

⁹⁶ Lord Halifax, 'Austria and Czechoslovakia', 12 March 1938. CAB 24/275/31.

⁹⁷ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 12 June 1935 in A. Eden, 'German Danger'.

⁹⁸ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London, 2002), p.308.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.325.

¹⁰⁰ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.138.

¹⁰¹ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.263.

aggression by much of the world and compounded with Schuschnigg attempting to amass power within the *Vaterländische Front* at the expense of the *Heimwehr* Starhemberg's position was unattainable.¹⁰² On 14 May 1936 he resigned as Vice-Chancellor, the *Vaterländische Front* was dissolved and Schuschnigg lost the support of the *Heimwehr*.¹⁰³ With the loss of the *Heimwehr* and the effectiveness and loyalty of the Austrian police and army in doubt, due to Nazi infiltration, Schuschnigg's regime now relied entirely on the Stresa Powers to defend Austria's independence.¹⁰⁴

Abyssinia divided the Stresa Powers with Britain and France furious at Mussolini's aggression; they began to organise League of Nations sanctions against Italy, which Germany was not party to after Hitler withdrew Germany from the League within months of coming to power.¹⁰⁵ Despite Hitler not forgiving Mussolini for his "sabre-rattling on the Brenner" in 1934 he sympathised with his "brother dictator" and lent him tacit support.¹⁰⁶ The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 17 July 1936 destroyed any chance of rebuilding the Stresa Front, as Hitler and Mussolini supported Franco and the Nationalists whilst Britain and France argued for non-intervention and tried to arrange for greater sanctions against Mussolini that only served to further drive him into Germany's open arms.¹⁰⁷ In regards to the fifth column, Germany was fulfilling its role as the sponsor, by exploiting the fallout from Abyssinia, and then Spain, to create conditions that would allow the Austrian Nazis to operate more effectively. Without the support of the *Heimwehr* and Mussolini, Schuschnigg, who according to Sir Nevile Henderson, Phipps' successor, only enjoyed the confidence of 15 percent of the population, was forced to directly negotiate with Hitler in July 1936.¹⁰⁸

In his memoirs Schuschnigg argues that the Austro-German Agreement of 11 July 1936 was his attempt to "normalise" relations as the Stresa Powers had abandoned Austria and left him with no choice.¹⁰⁹ Hitler agreed to rein in the Austrian Nazis, end their terrorist campaign and recognise Austrian independence and refrain from interfering in Austria's internal affairs; in return Schuschnigg would grant a general amnesty to the 17,045 Nazis that languished in Austrian prisons, including the leadership of the NSDAP, SA and SS and declare Austria to be a German state and follow Germany's foreign policy.¹¹⁰ The Agreement marks a turn in the strategies and organisation of the Austrian fifth column, moving from the violent, gangster-like outfit that had instigated the 1934

¹⁰² Edmondson, *Heimwehr*, pp.257-260.

¹⁰³ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.123.

¹⁰⁴ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.282.

¹⁰⁵ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, pp.299-304.

¹⁰⁶ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 18 September 1935 in A. Eden, 'German Danger'.

¹⁰⁷ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.274, Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.131, and Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.257.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p.116.

¹⁰⁹ Schuschnigg, *The Brutal Takeover*, p.141.

¹¹⁰ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, pp.163-165, and UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 8 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

Putsch, into a more sophisticated, political movement under the guise of Austrian nationalism that would successfully achieve their aims of *Anschluss* with Germany.

Austrian Nationalism – Nazism Rebranded

The failure of the 1934 Putsch taught many Nazis that their previous Austrian policy had been a mistake, as it only provoked Italian and global hostility. After the putsch the Austrian SS, SA and the Austrian Legion were all publicly dissolved, but they quickly reorganised and rebuilt themselves within a matter of months, operating as underground, illegal entities that would return to the political mainstream when Hitler decided to make a second attempt.¹¹¹ As early as December 1935 Phipps recognised that Berlin would need to be patient; if Austria were to fall to a fifth column it would be harder for the rest of the world to justify intervention:

The fact the Austrian question is in cold storage does not mean that Germany has in any way renounced her aims. It only means that she intends to realise them less clumsily. At any moment, however, events may occur which will bring about a reversion to the more brutal methods of the past.¹¹²

New leaders of the Austrian fifth column were to come to the forefront as the Austrian Nazis reorganised themselves into 'Austrian Nationalists'. They were spearheaded by Franz von Papen, the new German Ambassador to Vienna and Hitler's former Vice-Chancellor, Arthur Seyss-Inquart and Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, two ambitious politicians. Of these three men only von Papen was a *Reichsdeutsche* and, in his capacity as Ambassador, could openly declare himself to be a member of the Nazi regime. Churchill noted that his role was to work within the Austrian political system, he maintained Austro-German relations and lobbied for the NSDAP to be once again recognised as a legal body.¹¹³ The other fifth column leaders had to keep their loyalty to the NSDAP a secret and publicly declared themselves to be Austrian Nationalists, a paradox noted in Starhemberg's memoirs:

In other countries ... the aim of the nationalists is an obvious one: nationalism in these countries means service to the country. In Austria, on the other hand, nationalists are

¹¹¹ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.143.

¹¹² UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 10 December 1935 in A. Eden, 'German Danger'.

¹¹³ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, pp.203-204.

working against Austria, for they want to give up Austria and become absorbed into the German Reich.¹¹⁴

Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau had to work in the grey area between legality and criminality as if their true affiliations were to become known to the Austrian authorities they risked imprisonment, deportation or execution. Low argues that the fact that these Nazi frontmen, operated in a public and legal manner as Austrian Nationalists meant they were of more use to Hitler than the Nazis who operated illegally. Allowing Berlin to maintain an appropriate distance, and level of deniability, from them but still retain control and direct their actions.¹¹⁵ Despite this distancing between Berlin and her Austrian pawns it was evident to many that Seyss-Inquart was “the chief Nazi agent” and, as Schuschnigg described him, “the loudspeaker for telephoned orders from Berlin”, whilst Glaise-Horstenau was “nothing but a silent witness” to the Nazi plans.¹¹⁶ Starhemberg noted that this change in Nazi tactics from violence to political undermining represented a greater threat to Austrian stability as it was harder to counter, and by not being a visible threat there was nothing for the remnants of the *Vaterländische Front* to galvanise against.¹¹⁷

Glaise-Horstenau was the first of the closet-Nazis to ascend to Schuschnigg’s cabinet as a result of the Austro-German Agreement, an act that Bullock argued was representative of growing Nazi influence in Austria after the *Heimwehr* abandoned Schuschnigg.¹¹⁸ In his memoirs Schuschnigg says that Glaise-Horstenau was “an undisputed ‘national’ (Austrian Nationalist) through not a National Socialist”, perhaps indicating his own naivety towards his Minister’s political intentions, or he was simply a man who became entangled in the Nazi web.¹¹⁹ Low argues that Glaise-Horstenau was disappointed with the implementation of an Austro-German Agreement and considered resigning in October 1936. However his Nazi handlers convinced him to stay and “continue to play his double role.”¹²⁰

Seyss-Inquart had previously been a junior member of Dollfuss’ cabinet and in July 1937 became a State Councillor.¹²¹ Like Glaise-Horstenau, Seyss-Inquart was a “bourgeois professional” and not a secret member of the NSDAP; he enjoyed the confidence of both Hitler and Schuschnigg, making him a valuable asset for Berlin.¹²² Seyss-Inquart was often publicly at loggerheads with the

¹¹⁴ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.25.

¹¹⁵ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, pp.175-176.

¹¹⁶ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.200, and Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.7.

¹¹⁷ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.183.

¹¹⁸ Bullock, *Study in Failure*, p.292.

¹¹⁹ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.172.

¹²⁰ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.187.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.189.

¹²² Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.178.

illegal Nazi leader Captain Leopold (who still remained in Austria), refusing to join the NSDAP and therefore submit himself to Leopold's control; this helped to assure Schuschnigg of his loyalty to Austria and not the Nazi cause of a unified German Reich.¹²³

As Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau worked to cripple the Schuschnigg regime from within, the illegal underground NSDAP was effectively under the control of radical Nazis, Captain Leopold and Ernst Kaltenbrunner the SS leader, both men took their orders from Himmler and were firmly under the control of the German SS.¹²⁴ In his memoirs Schuschnigg describes Leopold and Kaltenbrunner as "revolutionary law-breakers", bent on *Anschluss* via violence in the style of 1933 in Germany, and in turn they were opposed by the "apostles of evolution", Seyss-Inquart, Glaise-Horstenau and von Papen, who desired a gradual *Gleichshaltung* of Austria.¹²⁵ Despite the rivalries between the moderates and the radicals, they all worked towards the same goal, *Anschluss* with Germany, something Schuschnigg concludes in his memoirs:

National-Socialism in Austria implied unconditional Hitler discipleship; in spite of internal personal rivalries this went far deeper than we were prepared to admit at the time. The Austrian Nazi Party had become a Hitler movement.¹²⁶

Despite agreeing to refrain from interfering in Austria's internal affairs and reining in the Austrian Nazis in the Austro-German Agreement, Hitler continued to coordinate and support his fifth column and apply pressure on Schuschnigg, and called for a plebiscite to settle the *Anschluss* question.¹²⁷ Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau advocated for Schuschnigg to personally meet with Hitler in Germany, arguing that such a meeting would help to end any unfortunate confusion between Berlin and Vienna and ease tensions.¹²⁸ Schuschnigg agreed to an invitation by Hitler and travelled to Berchtesgaden on 12 February 1938, a move which Henderson described as a mistake on his part as it undermined his authority and gave credence to the Nazi cause.¹²⁹ Schuschnigg defended his actions saying that he feared "being reproached by international, and particularly British, opinion for having brushed aside a conciliatory gesture by Germany."¹³⁰ The Berchtesgaden meeting between Hitler and Schuschnigg was "blackmail amounting to aggression" which Schuschnigg described as

¹²³ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, pp.183-184.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.146 and p.174.

¹²⁵ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.209.

¹²⁶ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.208.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.171.

¹²⁸ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.361.

¹²⁹ Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p.119.

¹³⁰ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.174.

“the worst day of his life” on returning to Vienna.¹³¹ Under the threat of a German invasion of Austria Schuschnigg was forced to agree to the appointment of Seyss-Inquart as Interior Minister, effectively handing control of the Austrian police to the NSDAP, Glaise-Horstenau remained in the cabinet as Minister without Portfolio, and the NSDAP was to be legalised with a general amnesty for all Austrian Nazis.¹³²

In April 1937, before leaving Berlin to take up his post as Ambassador to Paris, Phipps confided in his diary that Germany’s increasing power, due to Hitler’s massive rearmament programme, would draw many Austrians into the Nazi fold.¹³³ This turned out to be true. Following the Berchtesgaden Agreement the fifth column showed their true colours and the full extent of their power in Austria. On his appointment as Interior Minister Seyss-Inquart flew to Berlin and met with Himmler and other high-ranking Nazi leaders; he returned with NSDAP staff and permitted the displaying of the swastika, regardless of Schuschnigg’s objections.¹³⁴ In his diary on 5 March 1938 Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, wrote of this sudden Nazification of Austria:

[News from Austria] gets worse and worse – in Styria the Nazis are in control of everything, the streets and barracks. In the other provinces they are making rapid progress. People are beginning to talk of Seyss-Inquart as Chancellor, with the specific task of digging the grave of Austria’s independence.¹³⁵

‘Seyss-Inquart, Hitler, Himmler and Heydrich in Vienna, Austria, 1938.’
Source, German Federal Archive, Bild 119-5243. Accessed via the World War II Database http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=8170
Accessed 29 October 2015.



¹³¹ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 8 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ ‘13 April 1937 Entry’, Johnson (ed.), *Our Man in Berlin*, p.204.

¹³⁴ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 8 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Low, *Anschluss Movement*, pp.385-386.

There were reports of uniformed SS men appearing on the streets of Linz and in an extremely short space of time Austria was rapidly falling under the control of Seyss-Inquart and the NSDAP who took their orders from Berlin.¹³⁶ Schuschnigg needed to regain the momentum and secure his position. Without consulting his cabinet, which contained Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau, he threw down the gauntlet to Hitler on 9 March 1938 with a speech at Innsbruck.¹³⁷ Schuschnigg announced that on 13 March all Austrians, male and female, over the age of twenty-four, would vote in a plebiscite on the future of the Republic; either Austria would remain independent or it would join Germany.¹³⁸ Schuschnigg argues that the plebiscite would “clarify the situation internally and externally and put an end to Germany’s double game.”¹³⁹ In his diary Oliver Harvey, Anthony Eden’s private secretary, wrote of Schuschnigg’s decision “it looks as if we might be in for a Nazi putsch there now, which ever way the vote goes.”¹⁴⁰

March 1938 *Anschluss*

In his memoirs Anthony Eden remarked that the proposed plebiscite was “the principles of self-determination ... being neatly used to turn the tables against Hitler”: if the Austrian people roundly rejected *Anschluss* with Germany then Hitler would have to stay his hand.¹⁴¹ This was something Hitler could not risk, *Anschluss* was the cornerstone of Nazi foreign policy and would be the first step towards creating a Greater German Reich and a continental empire in Eastern Europe. If he failed in Austria he would look weak both at home and abroad and his enemies would begin preparing to manoeuvre against him. Thus he had to kill the plebiscite in its crib and move against Austria before his opponents could galvanise and interpose on Austria’s behalf. With Italy now an ally of Germany after signing the Anti-Comintern Pact on 6 November 1937, only British and French intervention could save Austria.¹⁴² Starhemberg warned Schuschnigg that they couldn’t expect the British or French to come to the rescue as Mussolini’s actions in Abyssinia and Spain had destroyed a united Stresa Front, which would have been able to curtail Hitler’s actions.¹⁴³ In his memoirs Schuschnigg admitted that Austria’s defences were based entirely on the assumption that foreign powers would come to her assistance like they did in 1934, but by 1938 Austria was alone.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 8 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹³⁷ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.401.

¹³⁸ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 8 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹³⁹ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.254.

¹⁴⁰ ‘9 March 1938 Entry’, J. Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, (London, 1970), p.122.

¹⁴¹ A. Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London, 1965), p.7.

¹⁴² Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p.328.

¹⁴³ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.274.

¹⁴⁴ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.281.

When Mussolini was informed of the decision to hold a plebiscite he remarked that it was “a bomb which would surely burst in Schuschnigg’s own hand”; the proposed vote would lead to violence and unrest in Austria that would justify German intervention.¹⁴⁵ A wave of bombings, shootings and disorder swept through Austria as the Nazis, under the direction of Berlin, created chaos. On 10 March Hitler ordered General Fedor von Bock to mobilise the *Wehrmacht* and prepare to invade Austria.¹⁴⁶

Schuschnigg first learnt of Hitler’s mobilisation order at 5.30 a.m. on 11 March, when the Vienna Police Headquarters informed him that the Austro-German border had been closed and rail links with Germany had been cut, shortly after the Austrian Consul in Munich messaged with the news that the *Wehrmacht* was heading towards the Austrian border.¹⁴⁷ A few hours later Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau presented Schuschnigg with an ultimatum to cancel the plebiscite. Otherwise the Nazis would run riot during the polls that would justify German intervention.¹⁴⁸ Seyss-Inquart had been in telephone contact with Herman Goring, with the *Luftwaffe* leader pulling the strings from Berlin, and informed Schuschnigg that if Goring did not receive a reply from Seyss-Inquart then it would be assumed he was being hindered and Berlin would respond violently.¹⁴⁹ Schuschnigg replied to Goring, via Seyss-Inquart, that he would cancel the plebiscite if the Nazis agreed to keep the peace.¹⁵⁰ Berlin rejected the proposal and issued a fresh ultimatum; Schuschnigg would resign, Seyss-Inquart would succeed him as Chancellor, a new NSDAP government would be formed and the Austrian Legion would be allowed to return to keep order in Vienna.¹⁵¹ The reformed Austrian Legion had been demilitarised (like the rest of the SA after the Night of the Long Knives) and transformed into a civil army of administrators and officials that would supplant the Austrian civil service and run the country on the principles of *Gleichshaltung*.¹⁵²

In the face of increasing violence both internally and externally Schuschnigg and his government resigned. At 8 p.m. Schuschnigg broadcast the following message over the radio:

The German government today handed to President Miklas an ultimatum with a time limit attached, ordering him to nominate as Chancellor a person to be designated by the German government and to appoint members of a cabinet on the orders of the German government;

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, p.121.

¹⁴⁶ Low, *Anschluss Movement*, p.402.

¹⁴⁷ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.208.

¹⁴⁸ FO Memorandum, ‘Confidential Summary of Events in Austria on the 11 March as reported by His Majesty’s Representatives at Vienna and Berlin’, 11 March 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹⁴⁹ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.209.

¹⁵⁰ FO Memorandum, ‘Summary of Events in Austria’, 11 March 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 1 April 1938. FO 371/21749.

otherwise German troops would invade Austria ... President Miklas asks me to tell the people of Austria that *we have yielded to force*.¹⁵³

Seyss-Inquart ascended to the Chancellorship, with Glaise-Horstenau as his Vice-Chancellor, and on 13 March publicly invited the *Wehrmacht* to enter Austria under the pretext of restoring order and annex Austria into the Reich as the province of *Ostmark* (Eastern March).

Seyss-Inquart formally joined the NSDAP on the day became the new *Reichstatthalter* (Reich Governor). Henderson later remarked that his new position was a vague non-entity and predicted that now he had served his purpose to the Nazi cause he would soon fall back into obscurity.¹⁵⁴ Kaltenbrunner was promoted to *SS-Brigadeführer* and made High SS and Police Leader for Austria, where he set about reorganising the police force into an instrument of suppression and presided over a vicious purge of the remnants of Schuschnigg's regime.¹⁵⁵ "Nazi vengeance does not forget" noted the UK Consul in Vienna as the Nazis arrested, imprisoned and executed key figures in the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg regimes; General Zehner and Major Fey, who both played key roles in crushing the 1934 Putsch, committed suicide, with Fey shooting his wife and son before himself.¹⁵⁶ The precise circumstances of their deaths, and the spate of suicides throughout the country, are unknown. However there is evidence that they were coerced by vengeful Nazis into killing themselves. Zehner's wife reported that the police officer who arrived at their house after the General's death said that this was the fifteenth suspicious suicide that he had dealt with since the *Anschluss* and that it must be kept secret; "otherwise people will say that things are as bad here as in Moscow."¹⁵⁷

Overview

Starhemberg, who escaped to Switzerland after the *Anschluss*, described Hitler's annexation as "the brutal conquest of Austria already undermined by Hitler's machinations."¹⁵⁸ Without doubt the fifth column played an integral role in the *Anschluss*. Yet we will never know the true extent of the fifth column's size. On 10 April 1938 the Nazis held a plebiscite in Austria to legitimise their actions; the vote passed with 99.75 percent of Austrians in favour.¹⁵⁹ No one can seriously imply that this result reflected the genuine level of support for the Nazis or how many Austrians were part of the fifth

¹⁵³ Schuschnigg, *Brutal Takeover*, p.3.

¹⁵⁴ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 9 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹⁵⁵ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 'Memorandum by Military Attaché dated 29 March 1938 – Reorganisation of Police in Austria', 30 March 1938. FO 371/21749.

¹⁵⁶ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 13 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹⁵⁷ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 13 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

¹⁵⁸ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p.276.

¹⁵⁹ UK Consulate Vienna to FO, 11 April 1938. FO 371/21750.

column as members of the SS, SA, Austrian Legion and NSDAP. Without doubt thousands of Austrians worked to weaken the Republic from within and key figures like Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau acted as the main perpetrators. To quote Starhemberg:

“The Nazi Fifth Column, while sowing suspicion and disintegration and undermining confidence in Austria and the Austrian Government, managed to more and more to make Schuschnigg its tool, mainly through the agency of persons who were often unaware of the use to which they were being put.”¹⁶⁰

Using means of political subversion backed by threat of violence the *Anschluss* proved that fifth columns were an effective means of territorial and political expansion. Pauley argued that the secret to their success was “pledging their allegiance to a common ideology”, an argument I concur with.¹⁶¹ Germany was now the hammer and Berlin would use fifth columns throughout Europe and the Middle East to cripple their opponents and prep them for invasion and conquest.



‘German propaganda at the voting booth urging Austrians to vote for annexation, 10 April 1938.’ Source, World War II Database, http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=236 Accessed 29 October 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Starhemberg, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, p286.

¹⁶¹ Pauley, *Forgotten Nazis*, p.225.

CHAPTER II – SUDETENLAND

“Beside an open grave”

The Prague leaders are now reaping the consequences of their twenty years of anti-German home and foreign policy. They have disregarded all warnings whether from the *Sudetendeutsch*, Slovaks, or Hungarians and have tried to preserve the fiction of a Czech national State as long as possible, in reliance on the one-sided distribution of powers in Europe. Prague now stands beside an open grave in which all hope of the maintenance of the Versailles system must be buried.¹⁶²

Völkischer Beobachter, the official NSDAP newspaper, declared on 24 March 1938 eleven days after the Austrian *Anschluss* as Berlin turned its sights towards the 3.5 million *Sudetendeutsche*, that lived on the western fringes of Czechoslovakia, in an area termed the Sudetenland. Hitler and the Nazis considered Czechoslovakia as an artificial construct of Versailles where the Czechs were given dominion over Germans, Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians and they made no secret of their desire to dismantle the Czechoslovak State.¹⁶³ However Czechoslovakia was an incredibly powerful state with strong international alliances and a modern well-equipped army; it was not going to be as easy to threaten and bully as Austria. Instead Berlin would have to play a more intelligent game and work to severely weaken Czechoslovakia from within before she revealed her hand. The *Sudetendeutsche* were to be one of her fifth columns inside Czechoslovakia, under the façade of the *Sudetendeutschen Partei* (SdP) led by Konrad Henlein.¹⁶⁴ This chapter will examine the *Sudetendeutsche* fifth column in four sections: First the power of the Czechoslovak State, its foreign alliances and its military might. Second, the formation of the SdP by Henlein and its operation inside Czechoslovakia before the Austrian *Anschluss*. Third, the SdP after the *Anschluss*; how it began to flex its political muscle and increase its power within Czechoslovakia. Finally, the internationalisation of the Sudetenland issue, from the Eger Incident of 20 May 1938 to the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 which resulted in the German annexation of the Sudetenland.

Czechoslovak Power

Czechoslovakia was a key player in a string of European alliances that were established in the wake of the First World War to act as collective security against the potential of a resurgent and aggressive Germany. The first of these international alliances was the Little Entente between Czechoslovakia,

¹⁶² *Völkischer Beobachter*, 24 March 1938 in UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 24 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

¹⁶³ A.L. Kennedy Report to FO, 'The Problem of Czechoslovakia', 5 April 1938. FO 371/21716.

¹⁶⁴ N.B. Chapter III will deal with the second German fifth column inside Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks.

Romania and Yugoslavia formed in 1921 with the encouragement of the French. The original intention of this alliance was to counter any attempt at a restoration of the Hapsburg monarchy or a reincarnated Austro-Hungarian Empire in these former Imperial territories.¹⁶⁵ Together the Little Entente formed a regional power bloc in Central and South-Eastern Europe that would be able to balance out the power of Fascist Italy and the USSR (established in October 1922 after the March on Rome and December 1922 after the end of the Russian Civil War respectively), and ensure these countries independence. The rise of Hitler and the rearming of Germany saw this alliance increasingly strained as Germany sought economic domination in South-Eastern Europe and new markets for its manufactured goods, foodstuffs and raw materials for its re armament programme.¹⁶⁶ Eduard Benes, the Czechoslovak President, said as much to Basil Newton, the UK Minister to Prague, believing that Germany had greater ambitions in South-Eastern Europe and that Czechoslovakia was an obstacle and a step towards achieving those ambitions.¹⁶⁷ British MP Victor Cazalet remarked that the Little Entente was only effective regarding the pre-Nazi, disarmed Germany that was born from Versailles, when Hitler began his rearmament programme and Germany's strength grew the Little Entente began to fracture as the constituent members had to readjust to this new reality.¹⁶⁸

Czechoslovakia was also allied with France via the 16 October 1925 Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty, which was part of the Locarno Treaties of that year. The Treaty saw both countries pledge mutual assistance to one another in the event of a future conflict with Germany.¹⁶⁹ Czechoslovakia also signed a treaty of mutual assistance with the USSR on 16 May 1936, completing a web of continental alliances with the aim of containing Germany. As a result of these alliances the Nazis considered Czechoslovakia to be the cornerstone of an anti-German bloc that would need to be remedied.¹⁷⁰ Czechoslovakia was also in a geographically valuable position which Benes described as a "salient into the heart of the new German Reich".¹⁷¹ For the Germans this was intolerable; Czechoslovakia stuck into her eastern flank and her alliance with Moscow gave "Bolshevism a jumping off platform in Central Europe", to Berlin this was a serious and tangible threat by the Soviet

¹⁶⁵ J. Tampke, *Czech-German Relations and the Politics of Central Europe: From Bohemia to the EU* (Basingstoke, 2003), p.46.

¹⁶⁶ Lord Halifax Memorandum, 10 November 1938 in Lord Halifax, 'Central and South-Eastern Europe. Some political implications of the 'Anschluss' and the recent incorporation by Germany of the Sudeten Districts of Czechoslovakia, with particular reference to the Interim Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Economic Assistance to Central and South-Eastern Europe, and to the General Requirements of our Foreign Policy', 10 November 1938. CAB 24/280/12.

¹⁶⁷ UK Legation Prague to FO, 21 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

¹⁶⁸ Captain Victor Cazalet MP to Rab Butler, 25 April 1938. FO 371/21717.

¹⁶⁹ FO to UK Embassy Paris, 22 March 1938 in Lord Halifax, 'Situation in Central Europe', 23 March 1938. CAB 24/276/3.

¹⁷⁰ FO Memorandum, 'The Possibility of Neutralising Czechoslovakia', 1 June 1938. FO 371/21723.

¹⁷¹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 'Mr Leo Kennedy's conversation with President Benes on 16 March 1938', 22 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

Union and they were desperate to quash the Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance.¹⁷² Konstantin von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, remarked to Henderson on 11 September 1937 in Nuremberg that German-Czechoslovak tensions over the Sudetenland could only be reconciled if Prague detached itself from Moscow.¹⁷³ William Strang, head of the FO's Central Department, also noted that Czechoslovakia's geographical position made it an obvious obstacle to the creation of a Greater Germany with Austria as the main road from Berlin to Vienna ran through Prague, although no one in Berlin publicly aired this thought.¹⁷⁴ Newton later noted that with the incorporation of the Sudetenland into the Reich this situation would be rectified immediately.¹⁷⁵

Militarily Czechoslovakia was also a powerful nation with a secure economic and financial base to support her military power. The Sudetes mountains and a network of fortifications protected her western flank from German designs with Benes declaring that Czechoslovakia was a "European fortress".¹⁷⁶ The Czech air force was being expanded to 1,000 aircraft by August 1938 and Prague boasted a standing army of 1 million men with high morale and supplied with modern military equipment from the USSR.¹⁷⁷ The Skoda Works, situated in the Sudeten city of Pilsen, also produced huge quantities of modern munitions that supplied the Czechoslovak army.¹⁷⁸

Within this powerful Czech-dominated state, 3.5 million *Sudetendeutsche* lived in three separate and distinct districts around the Sudeten Mountains, who believed that they were second-class citizens, denied the right to self-determination, in an alien and artificial state. The majority of the *Reichsdeutsche* had no real love for their Sudeten cousins. However the Nazis saw them as a useful pawn in dismantling this incredibly powerful Czechoslovak State. To quote Strang:

The Reich Germans rather despise the Sudeten Germans as inferior members of their race. They are using the Sudeten German question as an instrument of policy, to strengthen their political and military position. They want in the first place to expel the Soviet Union from Central Europe and, indeed, to deny the use of Czechoslovak territory to any other great power.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 20 May 1938. FO 371/21719.

¹⁷³ FO Memorandum, 'The German-Czech Problem' 30 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

¹⁷⁴ Lord Halifax, 'German-Czechoslovak Relations. Mr Strang's visit to Prague and Berlin.' 31 May 1938. CAB 24/277/15.

¹⁷⁵ UK Legation Prague to FO, 16 May 1938. FO 371/21720.

¹⁷⁶ UK Legation Prague to FO, 'Mr Leo Kennedy's conversation with President Benes on 16 March 1938', 22 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

¹⁷⁷ General E.L. Spears Report to FO, 'Notes on a conversation I had with Dr [Edvard] Benes, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, on Monday March 14th, 21 March 1938. FO 371/21716.

¹⁷⁸ UK Legation Prague to FO, 'Mr Leo Kennedy's conversation with President Benes on 16 March 1938', 22 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

¹⁷⁹ Lord Halifax, 'German-Czechoslovak Relations. Mr Strang's visit to Prague and Berlin.' 31 May 1938. CAB 24/277/15.

The *Sudetendeutsche*, Konrad Henlein and the SdP

The first Nazi Party was formed by the *Sudetendeutsche* in May 1918 as the German National Socialist Workers Party, DNSAP, and was independent from the German NSDAP that was formed in February 1920.¹⁸⁰ When the NSDAP came to power in Berlin the DNSAP leadership realised that Prague was manoeuvring against them, as they preached a brand of Sudeten nationalism and pan-Germanism and had links with the NSDAP. To pre-empt the Czechs the DNSAP dissolved itself on 28 September 1933 and its leaders fled to Germany.¹⁸¹ This left a power vacuum among the *Sudetendeutsche* who continued to hold the ideals of the DNSAP. On 1 October 1933 a new organisation was founded by former gymnast Konrad Henlein, the *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront*. The SHF absorbed many former DNSAP members yet the leadership publicly distanced themselves from the ideals of Nazism and instead professed Sudeten nationalism, demanding greater autonomy within Czechoslovakia for the *Sudetendeutsche*. Throughout their lifespan as the SHF, later the SdP, the movement's political leadership denied that they were a subsidiary or affiliate of the NSDAP and never received or requested orders from Berlin.¹⁸²

In his memoirs Eden claimed that Henlein's movement was a Nazi organisation subsidised from Berlin on the outset with the aim of "building a Trojan horse by means of which the Nazis would penetrate and destroy the citadel."¹⁸³ Vansittart claimed that the "dreary gymnast", Henlein, was personally paid 150,000 RM a month by the NSDAP.¹⁸⁴ However Smelser argues that the SHF/SdP was not originally envisioned as a Nazi fifth column, and instead evolved into one as the result of political struggles in Germany and Czechoslovakia following the ascendancy of Hitler.¹⁸⁵ Evidence of this can be found in a speech Henlein gave on 9 September 1934 where he stated that he was against fascism and the Nazis and instead made overtures to other *Sudetendeutsche* and conservative Czech parties.¹⁸⁶ It was not until after the SHF was reorganised into the SdP, to contest the May 1935 parliamentary elections, and former DNSAP leader Karl Hermann Frank was appointed Henlein's deputy that the SdP began to increasingly lock-step with the NSDAP.¹⁸⁷ Henlein sought to create a broad movement, whereas Frank wanted to resurrect the DNSAP. Both men attracted

¹⁸⁰ Smelser, *Sudeten Problem*, p.48.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.53.

¹⁸² UK Legation Prague to FO, 11 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

¹⁸³ Eden, *Eden Memoirs*, p.10

¹⁸⁴ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p.470.

¹⁸⁵ Smelser, *Sudeten Problem*, p.11.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85.

supporters to the organisation and in the elections of 19 May 1935 the SdP received 1.25 million votes with sixty percent of *Sudetendeutschen* voting for the SdP.¹⁸⁸

In the Czechoslovak parliament the SdP Deputies brought forwards bills that would call for Czechoslovakia's constituent nationalities to be registered in racial associations that would represent each nationality's interests.¹⁸⁹ Membership of these racial associations would be compulsory for all Czechoslovak citizens, and each association would have its own services, e.g. German schools for Germans and Czech schools for Czechs. However employers would not be able to discriminate against individuals based on their membership of their racial association, especially in the administrative and security services.¹⁹⁰ The SdP argued that Czech officials, police and gendarmeries maintained a foreign regime of an alien race in the Sudeten districts and instead called for Sudeten Germans to fulfil these roles.¹⁹¹ The SdP also argued that as Sudeten Germans made up twenty-two percent of the Czechoslovak population then this proportion of the posts in Prague's central government departments should be reserved for Sudeten Germans.¹⁹² To many *Sudetendeutsche* these were fair arguments, as it would halt the Czech-bias against them, and it drew greater support for the SdP. On 18 October 1937 Henlein called for "self-administration and the performance of complete and executive functions by Germans in the German area" meaning autonomy for the Sudetenland *within* the Czechoslovak State, not apart from it.¹⁹³

In February 1938 Goring remarked to George Ward Price, the *Daily Mail's* foreign correspondent, that German policy towards the Sudetenland was gradual Nazification with the ultimate eventual aim of incorporation.¹⁹⁴ However this policy of gradual *Gleichshaltung* was abandoned in the wake of the Austrian *Anschluss*, when, fresh off his victory, Hitler turned his attention towards the Sudetenland in what Henderson called "the next definite item of Hitler's foreign policy."¹⁹⁵ The Nazis quickly immersed themselves in *Sudetendeutsche* politics and threw their full support behind the SdP transforming them into a fifth column movement. Following their failure to comprehend the Austrian fifth column, the British establishment began to understand how the Nazis exploited German minorities, with *The Times'* assistant foreign correspondent, Aubrey Leo Kennedy, remarking in a report to the Foreign Office:

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.120.

¹⁸⁹ FO Memorandum, 'The German-Czech Problem', 30 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 22 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

¹⁹² UK Legation Prague to FO, 19 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

¹⁹³ FO Memorandum, 'The German-Czech Problem', 30 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

¹⁹⁴ UK Legation Prague to FO, 21 March 1938. FO 371/21712.

¹⁹⁵ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 1 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

Nazi technique excels at using [German] minorities as advance guards of a policy of penetration and expansion.¹⁹⁶

'Hitler and Henlein, circa 1938.' Source, World War II Database, http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=717 Accessed 29 October 2015.



Austrian *Anschluss* – SdP Galvanised

The speed of the *Anschluss* caught Britain, and many others, off guard with foreign capitals desperately trying to understand why Austria fell so quickly and definitively to the Germans. Many Western officials, and even high ranking Nazis like Goring, believed that Berlin wouldn't make any further foreign policy manoeuvres regarding the Sudetenland until the autumn of 1938 when Austria has been "digested" into the Reich.¹⁹⁷ However the *Anschluss* electrified *Auslandsdeutsche* across Europe and the *Sudetendeutsche* were no exception. Within days the propaganda machine of the SdP was moving away from calls for autonomy inside Czechoslovakia towards succession and incorporation into *Grossdeutscheland*.¹⁹⁸ Newton remarked in a report that:

...during the past few weeks the majority of the *Sudetendeutsche* have ceased to be even nominally loyal to the [Czechoslovak] state as the [SdP] leaders still profess to be. ... Under

¹⁹⁶ A.L. Kennedy Report to FO, 'The Problem of Czechoslovakia', 5 April 1938. FO 371/21716.

¹⁹⁷ UK Legation Prague to FO, 21 March 1938. FO 371/21712.

¹⁹⁸ UK Legation Prague to FO, 19 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

the stimulus of the excitement caused by the *Anschluss*, Sudeten Germans have come to believe that the present time is particularly favourable for Germany.¹⁹⁹

Despite this observation the British establishment did not fully comprehend how quickly the SdP ballooned into a major force in Czechoslovakia, nor why so many *Sudetendeutsche* desired union with Germany against the professed desires of their leaders. Nor did they understand why the SdP leadership, especially Henlein, were prepared to throw their lot in with the Nazis. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Home Secretary, and his friend Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovak Ambassador to London and son of Tomáš Masaryk, the first Czechoslovak president, both believed that Henlein “would probably prefer to remain a great man in Czechoslovakia rather than a small man in Germany” and would fight against annexation.²⁰⁰ What neither the British nor the Czechs understood was how little control Henlein exerted over his own movement, instead remaining as an uncharismatic figurehead, a sort of anti-Führer, while genuine Nazis like Frank ensured *gleichshaltung* with the NSDAP. Officials like Strang and Newton, as late as May 1938, did not believe that Berlin wanted to annex the Sudetenland and would instead prefer to leave the *Sudetendeutsche* in place to exert pro-German political and economic influence over the rest of Czechoslovakia.²⁰¹ Halifax even believed with the *Anschluss* Berlin controlled Czechoslovakia’s only communication with Western Europe and could cripple the country through an economic stranglehold instead of political or military action.²⁰²

What the British did not understand was that under the *Führerprinzip* Germany foreign policy quickly became focused on Czechoslovakia and the digestion of Austria was largely ignored as a hindrance. Nor did Britain understand that Berlin was ideologically motivated. As Article I of the 1932 NSDAP programme states:

We demand the consolidation of all Germans into one great German State by reason of the right of self-determination.²⁰³

Many *Sudetendeutsche* favoured union with Germany to end the Czech-bias against them and because the Great Depression disproportionately hit them hardest with two-thirds of Czechoslovakia’s

¹⁹⁹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 6 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

²⁰⁰ Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Halifax, 25 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

²⁰¹ Lord Halifax, ‘German-Czechoslovak Relations. Mr Strang’s visit to Prague and Berlin.’ 31 May 1938. CAB 24/277/15.

²⁰² FO to UK Embassy Paris, 23 March 1938 in Lord Halifax, ‘Situation in Central Europe’, 23 March 1938. CAB 24/276/3.

²⁰³ Quoted in FO Memorandum, ‘The German-Czech Problem’, 30 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

unemployed being *Sudetendeutsche*.²⁰⁴ Therefore union with a politically and economically powerful Germany was preferable to their current situation in Czechoslovakia.

Several *Sudetendeutsche* political parties like the Agrarians, Industrialists and Christian Socialists merged with the SdP in the weeks following the *Anschluss* making the SdP the single largest party in the Czechoslovak Parliament with 49 Deputies.²⁰⁵ This led to calls from the *Berliner Tageblatt* that if the Czech were genuine democrats then, according to parliamentary tradition, a *Sudetendeutsche* should be the Prime Minister.²⁰⁶ As power solidified behind the SdP calls for autonomy became more strident but the Czechs were not willing to concede to their demands. Benes argued that Henlein was in Hitler's pay and autonomy would give Berlin control over Czechoslovak internal affairs and that it was practically impossible as the Sudetenland was not one continuous area but rather a string of German districts in the western frontier of Bohemia and Moravia.²⁰⁷ While the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, Milan Hodza, argued that if autonomy was granted to the *Sudetendeutsche*, then it would also have to be granted to the Poles, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Slovaks and would result in the disillusion of Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁸ Prague's continued resistance to even consider negotiations for autonomy, and provocations in the Sudetenland between SdP supporters and the Czech police, led to even greater support for the SdP. By mid-April 1938 the major German organisations in Czechoslovakia, including the Federation of the German Clergy, Bohemian German Evangelical Church, German Teacher's Association, German Political Labour Bureau and German Worker's Association, all either amalgamated with the SdP or pledged their allegiance.²⁰⁹ This led Newton to remark in a FO report that the strength of the SdP was not in the hands of the powerful German employers in the Sudetenland, but rather with their employees, as the SdP was growing into a mass movement.²¹⁰

On 24 April 1938 the SdP held a mass rally at Karlsbad where Henlein outlined the SdP's political programme, denounced the creation of Czechoslovakia following the First World War, the denial of the right of self-determination to the *Sudetendeutsche* and accused the Czechs of establishing a dictatorship that exploited the other nationalities.²¹¹ In the Karlsbad speech Henlein also openly professed his movement's adherence to the principles of Nazism, stating that it was the ideology of the German race and therefore it was only natural that the *Sudetendeutsche* adopt this

²⁰⁴ Tampke, *German-Czech Relations*, p.46, and Captain Victor Cazalet MP to Rab Butler, 25 April 1938. FO 371/21717.

²⁰⁵ UK Legation Prague to FO, 25 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

²⁰⁶ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 23 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

²⁰⁷ FO Memorandum, 'The German Minority in Czechoslovakia: The Next Step', 31 March 1938. FO 371/21714.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 11 April 1938. FO 371/21715.

²¹⁰ UK Legation Prague to FO, 4 May 1938. FO 371/21718.

²¹¹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 25 April 1938. FO 371/21716.

ideology to work within the framework of the law and press for autonomy, a sort of Nazism-light.²¹² To many this was the SdP showing its true colours as a Nazi puppet, and was confirmed when on 13 May 1938 the German Volunteer Defence Service, also known as the *Freikorps Sudetenland* (FS), was formed with Henlein as the FS's *Verbandsführer* (association leader) and radical Nazi, Willi Brandner, as the Chief-of-Staff and *de facto* leader.²¹³ SdP propaganda described the FS as “the spine of the movement” and “the ever watchful conscious of *Sudetendeutschland*” and unapologetically proclaimed that the FS was “required not for parades but for fighting.”²¹⁴ The FS engaged in acts of violence and provocation, under the guise of self-defence, against the Czech security forces, Jews, anti-Nazi *Sudetendeutsche* and anyone else deemed an enemy, acting as the SdP's SA.

The *Sudetendeutsche* quickly became Nazified with pictures of Hitler appearing on *Sudetendeutsche* newspapers accompanied by maps of *Grossdeutscheland*; the swastika was never displayed with many wearing the badge of the SdP instead.²¹⁵ *Die Rundschau*, the SdP's weekly newspaper, even published an article on the use of the ‘German greeting’ (Heil Hitler and the Nazi salute) as the practice had quickly become commonplace amongst the *Sudetendeutsche* to the ire of the Czechs.²¹⁶

Within three months of the Austrian *Anschluss* the SdP had grown into a powerful political force in Czechoslovakia with its own FS army, millions of members from all sections of *Sudetendeutsche* society and German support. However Berlin would not turn the screws on Prague until two SdP, and potentially FS, men (accounts vary) were shot dead by a Czech policeman on 20 May 1938 in Eger.²¹⁷ The deaths inflamed the *Sudetendeutsche* populace, leading to unrest, with Joachim von Ribbentrop, the new German Foreign Minister, claiming that there had been over 100 *Sudetendeutsche* casualties²¹⁸ at the hands of the Czech police the day following the shooting and stating that if Prague didn't agree to demands of autonomy then Germany would intervene.²¹⁹ The unrest in the Sudetenland and high-ranking Nazis speaking of intervention seriously unnerved the Czechs and there were reports of fortifications being hastily constructed in the Sudetenland after rumours of German troop movements from Berlin.²²⁰

²¹² FO Memorandum, ‘The Claims of the Sudeten Germans as expressed by their leader: April-May 1st 1938’, 10 May 1938. FO 371/21718.

²¹³ UK Legation Prague to FO, 14 May 1938. FO 371/21719.

²¹⁴ UK Legation Prague to FO, 16 May 1938. FO 371/21719.

²¹⁵ UK Legation Prague to FO, ‘Situation in Marienbad and Karlsbad Districts by HM Consul to Liberec, Pares, May 16th 1938’, 18 May 1938. FO 371/21721.

²¹⁶ UK Legation Prague to FO, 23 May 1938. FO 371/21721.

²¹⁷ UK Legation Prague to FO, 22 May 1938. FO 371/21720.

²¹⁸ N.B. Unspecified if ‘casualties’ defines persons injured or includes fatalities.

²¹⁹ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 21 May 1938. FO 371/21720.

²²⁰ UK Legation Prague to FO, ‘Copy of despatch from HM Consul in Liberec, Pares, May 21st 1938 – Atmosphere in the Sudeten Districts’, 23 May 1938, and UK Legation Prague to FO, 24 May 1938. FO 371/21722.

War did not come to Czechoslovakia in May 1938 and the situation following the Eger Incident dissipated as both Berlin and London entered the fray with the Sudetenland becoming a point of contention between the two powers. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain adopted a policy of appeasement towards the Nazis, conceding to Hitler's demands to at least postpone the wider conflict and allow Britain time to rebuild her defences. In this new context of internationalisation of an originally domestic issue, the Sudeten fifth column was to play a vital role. Through agitation and provocation they would ensure that the Sudetenland stayed in the international spotlight to allow Germany to exert pressure on Prague to extort concessions.

Internationalisation of the Sudetenland Issue

Unlike Austria we will fight. We shall be massacred but we will fight.²²¹

Benes had declared after the *Anschluss*. A statement that worried British ears after the Eger Incident and a potential Czech-German war which, due to Czechoslovakia's international alliances with France and the USSR, that could lead to a European conflagration. Several British officials also believed that the *Sudetendeutsche* were acting as Hitler's catspaw and that Berlin was following a Bismarck-era imperial policy towards Bohemia, as its economic and strategic position allowing Germany domination of Central Europe.²²² London understood Prague's fears that the loyalty of the *Sudetendeutsche* could not be guaranteed in the event of a Czech-German war, a key concern as Czechoslovakia's only fortifications against Germany were in the Sudetenland, and with the *Anschluss* Czechoslovakia's south-west frontier was now exposed.²²³ Chamberlain along with many others in the British Government saw the similarities with the outbreak of the First World War and sought to stem the developing situation as the SdP, at Germany's insistence, demanded the adoption of the Karlsbad programme and autonomy.²²⁴

By early September 1938 tensions between the *Sudetendeutsche* and Prague started to boil as Benes steadfastly refused to make any concessions to the SdP, no matter how slight, fearing that it would trigger a political avalanche that resulted in German annexation of the Sudetenland. On 5 September Henderson sent Halifax a cautionary letter stating:

²²¹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 22 March 1938. FO 371/21713.

²²² Mr Walter Reiss to Lord Halifax, 23 May 1938. FO 371/21722.

²²³ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.225 and FO to UK Embassy Berlin, 22 March 1938, in Lord Halifax, 'Situation in Central Europe', 23 March 1938. CAB 24/276/3.

²²⁴ Lord Halifax, 'German-Czechoslovak Relation. Mr Strang's visit to Prague and Berlin.' 31 May 1938. CAB 24/277/15.

The solution lies in Prague, not Berlin. Henlein himself has the plebiscite solution up his sleeve if Benes will not agree to something amounting to the Karlsbad programme ... None of us can ever think of peace again till Benes has satisfied Henlein ... Versailles was the error which has got to be corrected. Much as I hate saying so. Otherwise we might fight Germany again.²²⁵

Henderson recognised that Hitler refused to see the Sudetenland in any other light than that of a bastard of Versailles. This was confirmed on 12 September at the Nuremberg Rally when Hitler launched into a visceral verbal tirade against the Czechs.²²⁶ The following day Frank, the lead SdP negotiator and leader of the SdP parliamentary group, acting without Henlein's knowledge or consent, rang Hodza and issued an ultimatum: Czech security forces would leave the Sudetenland and their functions would be assumed by the FS, otherwise the *Sudetendeutsche* would break into rebellion which would lead to German military intervention.²²⁷ Chamberlain tried to pre-empt a German invasion and instead proposed to meet with Hitler in Germany to try and reach a settlement; Hitler agreed and Chamberlain flew out to Berchtesgaden on 15 September, the same day Henlein fled to Germany.²²⁸

At Berchtesgaden Hitler declared that the welfare and the right of self-determination of the *Sudetendeutsche* were his main concern, and that already 10,000 refugees had fled to Germany and the Czechs were firing artillery at civilian areas. He told Chamberlain that he was prepared to risk war to protect the *Sudetendeutsche* and saw the break-up of Czechoslovakia as inevitable as if he pressed for the *Sudetendeutsche* cause then it would be hard to ignore the claims of the Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians.²²⁹ Following the Berchtesgaden summit Harvey noted in his diary:

No more news from Czechoslovakia except that it looks if the situation in Sudeten areas is more and more threatening. Sudeten[s] are declaring themselves in open revolt and Czechoslovak Government say they are obliged to consider general mobilisation.²³⁰

²²⁵ 'Extract from letter from Sir Neville Henderson dated 5th September', in Lord Halifax, 'Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.' 11 September 1938. CAB 24/278/31.

²²⁶ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.233.

²²⁷ Smelser, *Sudeten Problem*, p.238.

²²⁸ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.233.

²²⁹ 'Translation of Notes made by Herr Schmidt, the German Interpreter of Mr Chamberlain's conversation with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden, September 15th, 1938', in Lord Halifax, 'Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.' 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

²³⁰ '18 September 1938 Entry', in Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, p.185.

The SdP, in particular the FS, kept the Sudetenland crisis on the boil with acts of unrest and terrorism against the Czechs, in the knowledge that the Czechs would respond with force and then German armed intervention would be justified. However the issue was now a point of international conjecture and a second summit was agreed to.

On 22 September at their second meeting at Godesberg Hitler told Chamberlain that the Polish and Hungarian Governments had asked Germany for assistance regarding their nationalities in Czechoslovakia. Hitler said that Czechoslovakia was born from unwilling Germans, Slovaks and Hungarians whose lands were “torn away by violence” from Hungary and that the Czechs “stole” Teschen and 100,000 Poles from Poland during the 1919-1921 Polish-Soviet War. He denounced Czechoslovakia as a state that “possessed neither a history, nor tradition, nor conditions of existence.”²³¹ During a meeting the following day, Hitler presented a ‘memorandum’ for the Czechs to Chamberlain, which Chamberlain accurately interpreted as an ultimatum despite the title. The ‘memorandum’ demanded that the Czechs immediately cede the Sudetenland to Germany, sever the alliance with the USSR and adopt a pro-German foreign policy, Chamberlain accused Hitler of acting like a conqueror to which Hitler replied: “no, like the owner of his property.”²³² This comment marks Hitler’s underlying ideological motivation: he was the Führer of *all* Germans, not just those within the Third Reich and he would pursue his aim of bringing all Germans into one state regardless of the reality, and the *Sudetendeutsche* fifth column owed absolute loyalty to him as their Führer. This was a factor which the British were only just starting to comprehend.

A final summit was held at Munich between the leaders of Britain, Germany, France and Italy from 29-30 September. The Munich Conference began with an Italian proposal that had actually been written by the Germans and given to Mussolini.²³³ The proposal was eventually agreed to by the four leaders, without Czechoslovak Government representatives present, and marked the break-up of Czechoslovakia with the cessation of German, Polish and Hungarian territories. Czechoslovak security forces had between 1 and 10 October to evacuate from the Sudetenland and *Wehrmacht* forces were to begin moving into the territory from 1 October with a plebiscite was to be held in the Sudetenland to confirm the German annexation.²³⁴ Following the Munich Conference Hitler assured

²³¹ ‘Notes of a Conversation held at Godesberg, September 22nd, 1938’, in Lord Halifax, ‘Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.’ 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

²³² ‘Notes of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler at Godesberg, September 23rd-24th, 1938’, in Lord Halifax, ‘Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.’ 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

²³³ ‘The Munich Conference, September 29, 1938’, in Lord Halifax, ‘Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.’ 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

²³⁴ ‘Proposals Submitted by the Head of the Italian Government (Provisional Translation’ in Lord Halifax, ‘Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.’ 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

Chamberlain that the Sudetenland was his last territorial claim in Europe and that his remaining European ambitions remained purely economic, a lie that resulted in war eleven months later.²³⁵

Overview

For many the Munich Conference marks the height of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, immortalised in the image of Chamberlain waving a scrap of paper, the Anglo-German Declaration that Hitler had not bothered to read before signing, declaring "peace for our time".²³⁶ However regarding this discourse the Munich Conference marks the power of fifth columns. The SdP had engineered a situation that not only achieved the aim of annexation but had also managed to blindsides the British Empire. Fifth columns were an effective tool of German foreign policy that, so far, had produced once unattainable results for the Nazis. Churchill noted:

In the single year 1938 Hitler has annexed to the Reich and brought under his absolute rule 6,750,000 Austrians and 3,500,000 Sudetens, a total of over ten millions of subjects, toilers and soldiers. Indeed the dread balance had turned in his favour.²³⁷

By manipulating the SdP into destabilising the Czechoslovak Government, consolidating *Sudetendeutsche* support behind one unified movement and campaigning for political autonomy the Nazis successfully achieved the ruination of a state they despised and feared. Benes resigned after Munich and was eventually succeeded by Emil Hacha in November; a man described by Churchill as a "nonentity" now President of a rump Czechoslovak state.²³⁸ Britain was late to understand how the *Sudetendeutsche* fifth column was being used by Hitler, a failure that would be repeated in the cases of both Slovakia and Danzig. With each failure British understanding of these movements would become more and more comprehensive and the British establishment began to take note of German fifth columns and began developing ways to counter them.

²³⁵ 'Note of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler, September 30th, at the latter's flat in Munich', in Lord Halifax, 'Central Europe. Czechoslovakia.' 6 October 1938. CAB 24/279/14.

²³⁶ N.B. Chamberlain is commonly misquoted as saying 'peace *in* our time' a phrase which appears in the *Book of Common Prayer*. 'Peace *for* our time' is Chamberlain echoing Benjamin Disraeli when he returned from the 1878 Congress of Berlin where he stated 'I have returned from Germany with peace for our time'.

²³⁷ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.265.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.260.



'Men of the para-military Sudetendeutsche Freikorps lining up to greet Hitler who was scheduled to arrive shortly, Niems, Sudetnland, Germany, 10 October 1938.' Source, German Federal Archive, Bild 146-1972-026-51. Accessed via the World War II Database, http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=8348 Accessed 29 October 2015.

CHAPTER III – SLOVAKIA “Germany’s spoilt nephew”

Suggestions for a severance of Slovakia from the Republic were, it is now known, put forward by the leaders of the German National-Socialist Party soon after Munich ... It looks as if Slovakia was to become Germany’s spoilt nephew.²³⁹

Michael Winch, a British diplomat, wrote in January 1939 shortly after a Slovak Diet was created in the autonomous post-Munich Slovakia. The Slovak Autonomists were spearheaded by the HSLS, a Slovak nationalist party that willingly offered itself as a fifth column to Berlin. Led by a Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso, and his deputy Karol Sidor, the party came to unify the Slovaks as the SdP unified the *Sudetendeutsche*. In a Republic already weakened by the loss of territory to Germany, Poland and Hungary the HSLS were to play a pivotal role in the complete destruction of Czechoslovakia. Despite being one the constituent parts of Czecho-Slovakia, the 2.7 million Slovaks did not enjoy political, economic or cultural parity with their Czech neighbours.²⁴⁰ These grievances crystallised around the HSLS who, in the knowledge of their own weaknesses in the face of Czech power, turned to Germany for support. Together Berlin and Bratislava would cooperate to terminate the Czech-dominated Republic and create a new order in Central Europe that would lead to war. This chapter will examine the Slovak fifth column in five parts: First, Slovak-Czech relations in the First Czechoslovak Republic. Secondly, the formation of the HSLS, its consolidation of power in Slovakia and first contact with Berlin. Third, the HSLS in the post-Munich Second Czechoslovak Republic and Slovak autonomy. Fourth, the end of the Czechoslovak Republic, declaration of independence and succession as a German protectorate. Finally, the German invasion of Bohemia and Moravia annexing the Ancient Provinces and 7 million Czechs into the Reich and the British realisation of the Slovak fifth column.

First Czechoslovak Republic

As discussed in CHAPTER II, Czechoslovakia was a powerful state with a strong economy and army and was a lynchpin in a string of anti-German European alliances with the USSR, France, Yugoslavia and Romania. The Slovaks, lacking a stable economic base, virtually no army, no intelligentsia and a barely literate population, joined this new state out of *realpolitik* rather than ideological desire. They feared falling once again under Hungarian domination, as the last Hungarian troops only evacuated

²³⁹ Mr Michael Winch, communicated to FO, 16 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁴⁰ UK Legation Prague to FO, 22 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

Slovakia in January 1919, and instead opted to join with the Czechs.²⁴¹ On 30 May 1918 the Pittsburgh Agreement was signed between Czech and Slovak leaders in the USA granting the two groups total equality in the new state.²⁴² Jelinek described the Slovaks as “a people without a history” in which their devout Catholicism was their defining characteristic.²⁴³ While Freund summaries the union of the two nations as a meeting between a stoic Czech and a carefree Slovak, “if the Czech is a realist, the Slovak is a dreamer”.²⁴⁴ Many contemporaries noted that the two national characters were often at odds with one another; a conclusion many drew from this was that under Austro-Hungarian rule the Czechs had become politicised and developed an intelligentsia, whereas the Slovaks had remained agricultural serfs. George Kennan, the secretary at the US Legation in Prague, summaries in his famous memoirs that the Slovaks were antagonised by the Czechs’ “aloofness, suspiciousness and their schoolmasterly attitude”.²⁴⁵

The new Czechoslovak Republic was strong and politically stable and could be counted as the most successful of the Versailles successor states. However the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks transformed into a master-servant relationship rather than a partnership of two equals, Czechs dominated Slovak economic, political and cultural life. A major grievance of the Slovaks was that Czechs taught in Slovak schools and held government positions, yet they refused to learn or speak Slovak. The Czech response was that the difference between the Czech and Slovak languages was no greater than the difference between two dialects and that there were not enough qualified Slovaks to take on these positions.²⁴⁶ A second blow to Czecho-Slovak relations was the Great Depression which disproportionately hit the Slovaks harder than it did the Czechs. Slovakia’s main export industries, timber and woodwork, were slashed in half and iron mining fell to 20 percent output.²⁴⁷ Rising unemployment, urban migration and inefficient agricultural practices meant Slovakia began to starve and people started to look to the political extremes, the Communists and the Nationalists, who both capitalised on Slovakia’s ills.²⁴⁸ The most prominent Slovak nationalist party was the HSLS, founded in 1918 after the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic by a Catholic priest, Andrej Hlinka, who accused Prague of attempting to deprive the Slovak people of their identity, nationality and faith via political, social and economic oppression.²⁴⁹

²⁴¹ V. Olivová, *The Doomed Democracy: Czechoslovakia in a Disrupted Europe 1914-1938* (London, 1972), p.99.

²⁴² B. de Colonna, *Czecho-Slovakia Within* (London, 1938), p.39

²⁴³ Y. Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party 1939-1945* (New York, 1976), p.1.

²⁴⁴ R. Freund, *Watch Czechoslovakia!* (London, 1938), p.39.

²⁴⁵ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, p.14.

²⁴⁶ Mr Michael Winch, communicated to FO, 16 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁴⁷ Olivová, *Doomed Democracy*, p.180.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.181.

²⁴⁹ Y. Jelinek, ‘Storm-Troopers in Slovakia: The Rodobrana and the Hlinka Guard’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), pp.97-119, p.98.

HSLs and Germany

The *Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana* (Hlinka Slovak People's Party – HSLs) quickly gained popular support in Slovakia and quickly monopolised the Slovak seats in the Czechoslovak Parliament after absorbing other smaller Catholic and Protestant Slovak parties.²⁵⁰ Hlinka died on 16 August 1938 and was succeeded by Tiso, the leader of the clerical wing of the party, side-lining Sidor who represented the fascist wing.²⁵¹ John Troutbeck, the secretary of the UK's Prague Legation, described Tiso as a 'level-headed' and 'politically skilful' operator who could control the radical wing of the HSLs.²⁵² The HSLs boasted its own paramilitary force; the Hlinka Guards, named after their deceased leader and modelled on the SA, and the *Rodobrana*, a resurrected Slovak-nationalist militia that acted as a Slovak SS.²⁵³ The Hlinka Guard was created in June 1938 by Alexander 'Sano' Mach, the HSLs's propaganda chief and a notorious pro-Nazi, who became the Guard's Chief-of-Staff. Karol Murgas another Nazi-sympathiser was made head of the Guard's political staff and Sidor became the Guard's Supreme Commander.²⁵⁴ The stated aims of the Hlinka Guard was to promote Slovak national life, maintain order and party discipline and defend HSLs meetings and fight against Czechs, Jews and 'Catholic extremists' (Slovak political opponents) who 'wanted [Slovakia] to be more Catholic than the Pope'.²⁵⁵ Kennan noted of the HSLs leadership in a report to Washington:

They are devout Catholics and in their mixture of nationalism and religion they resemble the Sinn Fein of Ireland. They are strongly anti-Semitic and anti-democratic. They have a predilection for swastika methods in internal politics. In foreign affairs they are more the moment anti-Czech, anti-Hungarian, wary of Poles and friendly with the Germans.²⁵⁶

Mach, Murgas and many younger Slovaks were notoriously anti-Czech, anti-Semitic and anti-Hungarian and began to look to Germany as a solution to Slovakia's ills.²⁵⁷ Unlike the Czechs, who maintained an anti-German bias, the Slovaks enjoyed good relations with Berlin and treated the Nazis as 'the enemy of my enemy' in the hope that Germany would facilitate the creation of a Slovak state.²⁵⁸ This played into Berlin's hands as the Slovaks would be a perfect fifth column in

²⁵⁰ Mr Michael Winch, communicated to FO, 16 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁵¹ Jelinek, 'Storm-Troopers in Slovakia', p.103.

²⁵² UK Legation Prague to FO, 9 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁵³ UK Legation Prague to FO, 14 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁵⁴ T. Procházka, *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia (October 1938 – March 1939)* (New York, 1981), pp.62-63, and Jelinek, 'Storm-Troopers in Slovakia', p.106.

²⁵⁵ UK Consulate Bratislava to UK Legation Prague, 17 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁵⁶ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Report on the Conditions in Slovakia', p.16.

²⁵⁷ UK Legation Prague to FO, 'Report of a conversation between Pares and Sano Mach, February 14th 1939', 21 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁵⁸ UK Legation Prague, 9 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

dismembering the remnant of the post-Munich Czechoslovak State. Kennan notes in his memoirs that many HSLs leaders had been cultivating ties with German officials which came as a surprise to Hitler on 19 October 1938 when Tiso and Ferdinand Durcansky, the editor of the HSLs newspaper *Natsup*, pressed Hitler into supporting an independent Slovak state instead of an autonomous one within Czechoslovakia.²⁵⁹ In the aftermath of Munich and the unsuccessful attempt to completely dissolve Czechoslovakia the Germans turned to the HSLs. Together the two would work in tandem to further destabilise and destroy the Republic they both despised. In a personal letter, Kennan wrote of the HSLs working with the Nazis:

[HSLs] leaders have been completely won over by the Germans through flattery, cajolery and display of force. They are making awful fools of themselves; dressing up in magnificent fascist uniforms, flying to-and-fro in airplanes, drilling comic-opera SA units and dreaming dreams of the future grandeur of the Slovak nation.²⁶⁰

Second Czechoslovak Republic

On 7 October, one week after Munich, the HSLs, with German backing, declared Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakia; on 15 December a constitutional amendment was made creating an autonomous Slovak Diet.²⁶¹ HSLs propaganda began to speak of a 'New Slovakia' which electrified the Slovak populace and made the fall of Czechoslovakia seem imminent. In Slovak parliamentary elections on 18 December the HSLs secured over 98 percent of the vote and they took their seats in Hlinka Guard uniforms.²⁶² Winch wrote of the newly energised HSLs, in particular its younger leaders such as Sidor and Durcansky:

They are strongly drawn to Germany, fiercely anti-Semitic, desire a total break with Prague and wish for Slovakia to be placed under German protection.²⁶³

One of the reasons Germany was so eager to maintain Slovakia as a territorial entity after Munich, was not only to assist the dismembering of Czechoslovakia, but to prevent a common Polish-Hungarian frontier in Eastern Europe. At Munich Germany allowed Hungary to annex the Slovak province of Ruthenia, with its large Hungarian population, and Poland to absorb the border city of

²⁵⁹ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, p.xvii.

²⁶⁰ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Excerpts from a personal letter of December 8, 1938', pp.7-9, p.9.

²⁶¹ El Mallakh, *The Slovak Autonomy Movement*, p.1, and UK Legation Prague to FO, 6 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁶² Mr Michael Winch, communicated to FO, 16 January 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

Teschen. Adding to the cloak of legitimacy provided by the principle of self-determination. After both countries began making further demands for Slovak territory, alienating the Slovaks, within weeks the HSLs published anti-Polish and anti-Hungarian propaganda and there were border incidents between Hlinka Guards and Hungarian militias.²⁶⁴ Berlin refused any further Polish and Hungarian demands for Slovak territory, as they wished to keep Slovakia as a buffer state between the two nations to prevent either one monopolising power in Eastern Europe, following a policy of divide and rule. Kennan noted in a report to Washington:

The Slovak leaders, whether they realise it or not, are completely in German power and such autonomy as they enjoy exists only through the grace of Hitler. All the Germans need to do in present circumstances is to withdraw their opposition to a common Polish-Hungarian frontier, and a good part of the Slovak state will be taken over by Hungary within a week.²⁶⁵

The Autonomous Slovak Government, under Prime Minister Tiso, also relied heavily on financial support from Prague, as it ran a deficit of over one billion crowns which they were unable to raise through taxation in the economically deprived Slovakia.²⁶⁶ This shortage of revenue acted as a moderating influence on the HSLs leaders who were forced to tone down their rhetoric against Prague.²⁶⁷ This is evident by Mach's speech on 12 February 1939 in Plestany to thousands of Hlinka Guards where he publicly called for anti-Semitic and anti-Czech actions, which he claimed drove capital out of Slovakia, to be restrained and that revenue would only return if the Hlinka Guard maintained order, not engage in street violence.²⁶⁸ This reliance on Czech financial support annoyed and embarrassed many HSLs leaders, Durcansky and Mikulas Pruzinsky, the Slovak Economics Minister, were prepared to look to Germany to remedy this situation and further push Slovakia deeper in Germany's debt, with Pruzinsky visiting Berlin in late February.²⁶⁹

Whilst Bratislava required financial support from Prague the HSLs was only prepared to pay lip service to the idea of Czechoslovakia and continued to work for an independent Slovakia. Evidence of this can be found with the making of Professor Vojtech 'Bela' Tuka the honorary head of the Hlinka Guards in mid-February 1939.²⁷⁰ Tuka was an extreme Slovak-nationalist who had originally founded the Rodobrana in 1923 before being sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, of

²⁶⁴ UK Legation Prague, 9 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁶⁵ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Report on the Conditions in Slovakia', p.18.

²⁶⁶ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Excerpts from despatch of March 9, 1939, from Minister Carr to the Department of State, on Slovak-Czech relations', pp.75-79, p.75.

²⁶⁷ UK Legation Prague to FO, 14 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁶⁸ UK Consulate Bratislava to UK Legation Prague, 17 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁶⁹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 6 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁷⁰ UK Legation Prague to FO, 14 February 1939. FO 371/22896.

which he served 10, in 1929 for treason by the Czechs.²⁷¹ Mach had been one of his protégés and facilitated his return to public life after his release from prison; his assistance to his former, notoriously anti-Czech mentor and his conciliatory speech in Plestany towards the Czechs marks the double-standards of the HSLs leaders. They were prepared take financial support from Prague whilst simultaneously despising and plotting against them. In early March the UK Ambassador to Warsaw, Sir Howard Kennard, reported back to London that the Polish Government were convinced that Berlin was engineering a fresh crisis in Czechoslovakia and the negotiations over Czech financial assistance to Slovakia would be the point of contention.²⁷² The British Government largely ignored this warning from the Poles, failing to understand how the Slovaks were being utilised by Berlin to create a second Czechoslovak crisis within a year of the Austrian *Anschluss*. In his memoirs former Czechoslovak President Benes, who resigned after the Munich Agreement, writes:

After Munich, pressure from Berlin and the feigned or real indifference of the other European States to the fate of the Czech countries completely isolated the Prague Government.²⁷³



'Portrait of Vojtech Tuka, date unknown.'
Source, Polish National Digital Archives, 2-15546.
Accessed via the World War II Database,
http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=18792
Accessed 29 October 2015.

²⁷¹ Jelinek, 'Storm-Troopers in Slovakia', p.98 and p.101.

²⁷² UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 7 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁷³ E. Benes, translated by G. Lias, *The Memoirs of Dr Eduard Benes: From Munich to New War and New Victory* (London, 1954), p.57.

By playing towards the Slovaks, a seemingly unimportant people to the British and many other European powers, the Germans were able to quietly use them as a fifth column to weaken the Czechoslovak State a second time. An FO Memorandum brutally summaries the situation in Slovakia in early March 1939, placing the blame for the crisis upon the Slovak's shoulders:

In spite of the material benefits the Czechs had showered upon Slovakia they had failed to win over the Slovaks who took Czech misfortunes as their opportunity and modelled their behaviour upon that of the Germans. For example a one party system was installed, the Jews were oppressed and the Hlinka Guard was organised on SS lines. Nor has German sympathy been lacking for Slovak aspirations.²⁷⁴

Succession

On 6 March 1938 Newton reported back to London that negotiations between the Prague and Bratislava governments were heading for a crisis. Bratislava demanded financial assistance from Prague, as Slovakia was still part of the Republic, yet Prague's help was conditional on Slovak loyalty to the Czechoslovak State.²⁷⁵ The HSLC leadership had no intention of remaining loyal to the Republic, and both Durcansky and Pruzinsky advocated for an independent Slovakia under German protection in HSLC propaganda.²⁷⁶ With negotiations breaking down and prominent Slovak leaders calling for succession many throughout Europe saw the Czecho-Slovak crisis as an excuse for German intervention after Hitler was stalled at Munich six months prior.²⁷⁷ Hlinka Guards began to organise protests, strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations and civil disorder as the Prague and Bratislava governments were at loggerheads, further inflaming the situation in Germany's favour.²⁷⁸

Hacha accused Tiso and his government of not doing enough to restore order in Slovakia and allowing subversive activities, hostile to the Czechoslovak Republic, to go unchecked.²⁷⁹ On 10 March 1939 Hacha dismissed Tiso and his government on the charge of not showing sufficient resistance to subversive activities that threatened the federal interests of the state.²⁸⁰ Slovakia would still be allowed to retain its autonomy and Jozef Sivak, Tiso's Schools Minister, was made Prime Minister.²⁸¹ Hacha also accused RAVAG in Vienna of being instrumental in stirring up anti-Czech resentment

²⁷⁴ FO Memorandum, 'Position of His Majesty's Government in connexion with possible developments of the Slovak Crisis', 13 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁷⁵ UK Legation Prague to FO, 6 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁷⁶ UK Legation Prague to FO, 10 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁷⁷ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 10 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁷⁸ Jelinek, 'Storm-Troopers in Slovakia', p.106.

²⁷⁹ UK Legation Prague to FO, 10 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸⁰ FO to the Dominion Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Eire (Ireland) 11 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

amongst the Slovaks to the point of disorder to justify *Wehrmacht* intervention to restore order.²⁸² This accusation was confirmed when on the night of the 10/11 March Durcansky, who had fled to Germany along with other HSLS leaders, broadcast a message from RAVAG encouraging the Hlinka Guards to maintain order and resist any Czech forces in Slovakia.²⁸³ Durcansky accused Hacha and the Prague Government of violating the constitution by dismissing Tiso's government and wanting to exploit the Slovak nation. He then declared that Slovakia would fight for her rights with German support.²⁸⁴

In the aftermath of Durcansky's broadcast, with German intervention seemingly inevitable, British Foreign Office officials were in a quandary over Germany's intentions for Czechoslovakia. Some believed that Germany desired a united Czechoslovak State within her political and economic sphere of influence, whilst others believed she wanted to completely dismember the Republic.²⁸⁵ Frantisek Chvalovsky, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, confided in Newton that regardless of Germany's demands Prague's only viable option was to concede to them.²⁸⁶ On 11 March Tiso, claiming to be the legitimate Head of Government of Slovakia, formally appealed to Hitler for assistance in the Czecho-Slovak Crisis.²⁸⁷ Recognising that Germany held the momentum and any chance of a solution Henderson remarked in a report to London:

The unpleasant fact to be faced is that no solution of the Czech problem will be worth anything unless it has German approval and in the interests of the Czechs themselves the best course will therefore be to leave the initiative to the German Government.²⁸⁸

On 13 March Henderson reported that German mechanised units were moving towards the Czech border, which had been left naked after annexation of the Sudetenland.²⁸⁹ Despite declarations of independence from Tiso and Durcansky and German mobilisation towards Czechoslovakia British Foreign Office officials did not believe that Slovakia actually desired independence. They argued that because it was not financially self-supporting Slovakia was unfit for any degree of independence and that instead she would remain part of a loosely federated Czechoslovak State under German

²⁸² FO to the Dominion Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Eire (Ireland) 11 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸³ UK Legation Prague to FO, 11 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ FO to the Dominion Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Eire (Ireland) 11 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 11 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 13 March 1939. FO 371/22896.

influence.²⁹⁰ These officials essentially treated both the HSLs declarations of an independent Slovakia under German protection as mere sabre-rattling to scare the Czechs into granting them greater concessions. However they recognised that Hitler was looking for an excuse to achieve an ambition that was denied to him at Munich, a triumphal march on Prague.²⁹¹

On the same day Hitler invited Tiso to Berlin where he informed the Slovak leader that he had sympathy for the Slovak people but they would be forced to take sides, either with Berlin or Prague. Hitler told Tiso bluntly:

Tomorrow at midday I shall begin military action against the Czechs ... Germany does not intend to take Slovakia into her *Lebensraum* and that is why you must either immediately proclaim the independence of Slovakia or I will disinterest myself from her fate. To make your choice I give you until tomorrow midday when the Czechs will be crushed by the German steamroller.²⁹²

From Hitler's offices in the Reich Chancellery Tiso telephoned the Slovak Government in Bratislava and informed them of Hitler's ultimatum. A special session of the Slovak Diet was called and at 10am on 14 March they declared an independent Slovak State and asked Hitler from them to be placed under German protection.²⁹³ Tiso returned to Bratislava as President of the independent Slovak Republic with Tuka as his Prime Minister, Sidor as Interior Minister and Durcansky as Foreign Minister, placing three violently anti-Czechs and pro-Nazis in the highest positions of government.²⁹⁴ The declaration of Slovak independence also turned the country into a one-party dictatorship granting Tiso and his Government power to rule by decree.²⁹⁵

Hacha and Chvalovsky were effectively summoned to meet Hitler on the same day and informed bluntly that Germany was to invade and occupy Bohemia and Moravia and that Slovakia was to be an independent state, if the Czechs resisted then they would be annihilated.²⁹⁶ Hacha had no choice but to accept Hitler's ultimatum On 15 March the 'Declaration by the German and Czechoslovak Governments' was issued stating that Hacha had placed the fate of the Czechs in

²⁹⁰ FO Memorandum, 'Position of His Majesty's Government in connexion with possible developments of the Slovak Crisis', 13 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² UK Legation Prague to FO, 21 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁹³ UK Legation Prague to FO, 14 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ UK Legation Prague to FO, 15 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁹⁶ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Personal notes, dated March 21, 1939, on the March crisis and the final occupation of Prague by the Germans', pp.80-87, p.84 and Harvey, *Diplomatic Diaries*, '14 March Entry', p.261.

Hitler's hands in the hope of restoring order and Hitler had accepted.²⁹⁷ At 6am that day *Wehrmacht* forces invaded and occupied Bohemia and Moravia bringing an end to the Second Czechoslovak Republic.²⁹⁸



'Jozef Tiso in Germany, March 1939'. Source, World War II Database, http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=18788 Accessed 29 October 2015.

Realisation

In the wake of the disillusion of the Czechoslovak State it became evident to many British officials that the Germans had used the Slovaks for their own aims. A FO Minute of 17 March makes this abundantly clear:

These latest developments remove any doubts there may have been that the Slovak separatists were all along in collaboration with Nazi elements in the Reich, if not with the German Government themselves. Indeed, it is more likely that, had German adopted a neutral attitude, the [Czechoslovak] Government would have succeeded in forestalling this separatist coup and re-establishing tolerable relations with the Slovaks.²⁹⁹

By mid-April British officials had obtained enough evidence to prove that the Germans had, without doubt, engineered the Slovak crisis and the declaration of independence on 14 March. One of the main pieces of evidence for the British was the 23 March German-Slovak Treaty whereby Germany agreed to the protection of the Slovak State, its territorial integrity and political sovereignty in

²⁹⁷ Procházka, *The Second Republic*, p.162.

²⁹⁸ UK Legation Prague to FO, 15 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

²⁹⁹ FO Minute, 'The Slovak Crisis', 17 March 1939. FO 371/22897.

exchange for *Wehrmacht* forces being allowed to erect fortifications in a 80 km zone in western Slovakia in which the *Wehrmacht* would be granted sovereign rights, meaning they were exempt from Slovak civil law. The Slovak military would be organised in cooperation with the *Wehrmacht* and Bratislava would conduct its foreign policy in conjunction with Berlin's.³⁰⁰ Ostensibly the military zone was Germany fulfilling its role as Slovakia's protector. However the fortifications were concentrated along Slovakia's northern frontier with Poland, causing great concern for Warsaw.³⁰¹ The Poles soon realised that their involvement in dismembering the Czechoslovak State at Munich, in one of the great ironies of history, had paved Hitler's path towards his next foreign adventure as he turned his gaze towards Danzig and the Polish Corridor.

The Germans formally annexed the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia into the Reich, bringing millions of non-Germans into the Third Reich and formally establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia on 16 March with Konstantin von Neurath as *Reichsprotektor* and Karl Hermann Frank as Secretary of State.³⁰² Hacha still continued as President of a puppet Czech Government but the Czechoslovak parliament was formally dissolved on 21 March, shattering any illusion that the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia had not been annexed by Germany.³⁰³ The effect of this annexation of non-German lands was to expose Hitler as a barefaced liar: At Munich he had declared to Chamberlain that the Sudetenland to be his last territorial claim in Europe, but the invasion and absorption of the Ancient Provinces and the bringing of over 7 million Czechs into the Reich exposed his true imperialist ambitions. Hitler's actions in March 1939 destroyed any chance of further appeasement from Britain or a rapprochement in Anglo-German relations. War with Germany was now virtually inevitable.³⁰⁴

Overview

Many contemporaries saw that the Slovak nationalists and the German imperialists had worked hand in glove to finally destroy the Czechoslovak Republic. Kennan wrote in a personal letter on 30 March that the Germans had pursued a policy of divide and rule, exploiting the divisions between the Czechs and Slovaks and creating an environment that would precipitate an invasion.³⁰⁵ Churchill stated that Nazi intrigues were responsible for convincing the HSLC leadership to take such a hostile

³⁰⁰ FO Memorandum, 'Status of Slovakia', 12 April 1939. FO 371/22898.

³⁰¹ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.272.

³⁰² Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Report of March 29, 1939, on the new regime in Bohemia and Moravia', pp.94-102, p.97.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.99.

³⁰⁴ Z. Shore, *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (Oxford, 2003) p.86.

³⁰⁵ Kennan, *Prague After Munich*, 'Excerpts from a personal letter of March 30, 1939', pp.103-105, p.104.

attitude towards the Czechs in negotiations for financial assistance and call for Slovak independence.³⁰⁶ Whilst Benes declared in his memoirs:

The separation of Slovakia and the act of treason against the Republic has been deliberately planned by some Slovak separatist leaders for months with the help of the Nazis and behind the back of Prague. Thus *with their full complicity* a Slovak protectorate was also established in those critical days.³⁰⁷

All contemporary sources agree that without the Slovak fifth column Germany would not have been able to achieve her aim of dissolving Czechoslovakia. Slovakia was the first example of the Nazis successfully using a non-German fifth column. The HSLs can be classified a fifth column as it fulfils all the classifications laid out in the Introduction for what defines a fifth column: They acted as Germany's agents inside Czechoslovakia, they used the means of political subversion and disorder to achieve their ends, the HSLs had been gestating in Slovakia since 1918 and were quick to offer their services to Germany in the autumn of 1938. Leading members of the HSLs had been in contact with high ranking Nazi Party officials and Germany pressured the Prague Government into making concessions favourable to the Slovaks and finally both Bratislava and Berlin worked to achieve a single objective, the disillusion of Czechoslovakia.

As with the cases of Austria and the Sudetenland the British Government was late in recognising the threat posed by the Slovak fifth column. However with Hitler breaking his promise not to incorporate the Czech provinces into the Reich the wool was finally being lifted from London's eyes. Hitler and the Nazis were bent on carving out a German Empire in Central and Eastern Europe and the destruction of Czechoslovakia was the removal of a serious obstacle to the birth of this empire. The Slovak fifth column had facilitated Czechoslovakia's demise without Hitler having to risk German lives in a war with Prague and Hitler would continue to use fifth columns as a weapon of territorial, political and economic expansion.

³⁰⁶ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, p.267.

³⁰⁷ Benes, *Memoirs*, p.58.

CHAPTER IV – DANZIG

“A pawn in the game”

Their object is to use the Danzig and Corridor questions as a lever to secure the neutralisation and ultimately, perhaps, a further partition of Poland. There is good evidence to show that Germany regards Danzig merely as a pawn in the game, and that her real aim is the break-up of the Polish State.³⁰⁸

Declared an FO Memorandum in mid-May 1939 on the NSDAP's activities in the Free City of Danzig. From the outset the British Government were aware that Berlin's fifth column in Danzig was a wing of the NSDAP and was working openly, legally and unashamedly for the incorporation of Danzig into the Reich. The fifth column leaders in Danzig made no secret of their desires for the city's return to Germany and proudly declared their unshakable belief in a Greater German Reich and their Führer. Compared to the fifth columns in Austria, the Sudetenland and Slovakia, who operated with a level of secrecy and deniability to achieve Hitler's aims, the Danzig Nazis operated in full view of the entire world, making no secret of their aims or even bothering to deny them. The Danzig fifth column should have been successfully understood and thwarted by the British, but that was not to be the case. In my opinion the Danzig fifth column was the most successful of all Germany's fifth columns, for they achieved total *Gleichschaltung* with the Reich before their annexation in September 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War. The Danzig Nazis were spearheaded by two rival men who hated and despised one another, Albert Forster the NSDAP *Gauleiter* (Regional Leader) and Arthur Greiser the Nazi President of the Danzig Senate.³⁰⁹ The Danzig Nazi Party had been founded in November 1925 but did not rise to prominence in the Free City until after Forster's appointment as *Gauleiter* by Hitler on 15 October 1930. When he arrived in Danzig on 24 October Nazi propaganda labelled that day as a turning point in the history of the Danzig Nazis, as he turned them from a small band of fanatics into a powerful political force and transformed the city in a mini-Reich within a few years.³¹⁰

This chapter will examine the Danzig fifth column in five parts: First, the context of the Free City and its relations with Poland and the League of Nations. Secondly, the early electoral successes of the NSDAP in the 28 May 1933 Danzig Volkstag elections.³¹¹ Third, how the Danzig Nazis consolidated their hold on power from May 1933 until the end of 1937 through the use of political manipulation, agitation and repression. Fourth, how the Danzig Nazis achieved *Gleichschaltung* with

³⁰⁸ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³⁰⁹ N.B. President of the Danzig Senate is equivalent to Prime Minister.

³¹⁰ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.33.

³¹¹ N.B. Volkstag is the Danzig Parliament.

Germany between 1938 and 1939 transforming it into a 'microcosm of the Reich' that was still nominally independent from Germany.³¹² Finally, the lead up to the German declaration of war against Poland on 1 September 1939 and Danzig's official annexation into the Reich on 2 September.

The Free City, Poland and the League of Nations

When the Free City of Danzig was established at Versailles it was placed under the auspices and protection of the League of Nations as a guarantee against German or Polish designs of the city and its valuable harbour.³¹³ The city was governed by a Senate, serving as the executive and led by the Senate President as the Head of Government; in turn the Senate was elected by the Volkstag which was elected by popular vote; the League of Nations High Commissioner who was appointed by the League acted as the *de facto* Head of State of the Free City.³¹⁴ The League, and by extension the High Commissioner, had three roles in Danzig; to guarantee Danzig's constitution, to arbitrate disputes between Danzig and Poland and to protect the city militarily.³¹⁵ This political set up was to ensure that neither German nor Poland exercised excessive influence or control over the Free City however 90 percent of the population was German and many in the administrative, economic and political elite were *Reichsdeutsche* who were intensely nationalistic.³¹⁶ Historians like Kimmich have even argued that 96 percent³¹⁷ of Danzig's populace were German and the Prussian elite, in particular military officers, pensioners and civil servants set the tone of the city's nationalistic leanings.³¹⁸ In 1919 at Versailles one official described the new Free City as "unquestionably German", a point that the Nazis would later use to justify reunification with the Reich.³¹⁹

Versailles not only created the Free City out of the old *Kaiserreich* but also created the Polish Corridor, to give Poland direct access to the sea and splitting East Prussia with its population of 1.6 million Germans from the rest of the Reich.³²⁰ The Poles called the Corridor Pomorze and considered it part of their ancestral homeland, despite its large German population that remained after

³¹² FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³¹³ N.B. For more on the creation of the Free City by the Treaty of Versailles and its political, economic, social and geographic situation at the time of its creation and for more on the Polish Corridor refer to G.G. Chisholm, 'The Free City of Danzig', *The Geographical Journal*, 55 (1920), pp.305-309, and R. Haferkorn, 'Danzig and the Polish Corridor' *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)* 12 (1933), pp.224-239, and R. Moorhouse, "The sore that would never heal": The Genesis of the Polish Corridor', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16 (2005), pp.603-613, and E.P. (no name given) 'The Free City of Danzig. Some Questions Regarding Its Status', *Bulletin of International News*, 16 (1939), pp.3-8.

³¹⁴ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

³¹⁵ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.12

³¹⁶ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

³¹⁷ N.B. There is a level of dispute over what percentage of Danzig's population was German, contemporary sources put the figure at 90 percent whilst historians have revised the figure between 90 and 96 percent, what all can agree on is that it was over 90 percent, making the German population a substantial majority.

³¹⁸ C.M. Kimmich, *The Free City: Danzig and German Foreign Policy 1919-1934* (New Haven, 1968) p.2.

³¹⁹ Quoted in Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.9.

³²⁰ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

Versailles.³²¹ Not only did many Germans see the Polish Corridor as an insult to their national pride but they saw it as an economic and military threat to East Prussia. They complained that the Polish were neglecting east-west communications routes across the Corridor in favour of north-south routes along it and that this hampered East Prussia's economy, but also in the event of war with Poland it would be impossible to transport troops, weapons and supplies from Germany leaving East Prussia virtually defenceless.³²²

Versailles established Danzig as Poland's principle harbour on the Baltic Coast, however the Poles realised early on that they couldn't rely solely on Danzig. During the 1919-1921 Polish-Soviet War German dockworkers in Danzig refused to unload war supplies bound for Poland, reinforcing Polish suspicions about the reliability of Danzig as her main harbour.³²³ The Polish solution was to establish a new port on the narrow strip of coast afforded to them on the Polish Corridor in the small fishing village of Gdynia eight miles north west along the coast from Danzig.³²⁴ Construction began in 1924 and by 1939 the population had grown to 100,000, many Danzigers saw Gdynia as an economic threat to their transit traffic and by 1933 Gdynia surpassed Danzig in total freight turnover.³²⁵ Many Danzigers, British and German officials, saw the construction of Gdynia as a deliberate Polish ploy to economically strangle Danzig, whereas the Poles argued that they were simply improving and diversifying their economic infrastructure.³²⁶ As with the Polish Corridor many Germans saw a military threat from Gdynia. The 1922 Danzig Constitution established Danzig as a demilitarised city with no standing army or defensive fortifications, however Gdynia as sovereign Polish territory could become a naval base and billet soldiers to protect the Polish Corridor from German revision and apply further pressure to Danzig.³²⁷

The 1919 census of Danzig puts the total population of the city at 324,000 with 308,000 of them German and 16,000 Poles, by the 1929 census the Polish population dropped to 15,000 whereas the German community grew to 387,000.³²⁸ Danzig's German population were deeply nationalistic, whom Warsaw saw as a threat to Poland, the Poles saw a demilitarised Danzig on the mouth of the Vistula River as key to their independence. The Military Attaché in the UK Warsaw Embassy noted that if Danzig were to be occupied by German troops then the defence of the Polish Corridor would be compromised and the German Army could use the city to facilitate an invasion of

³²¹ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³²² R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

³²³ Kimmich, *The Free City*, p.109.

³²⁴ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933, and FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³²⁵ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, pp.16-17.

³²⁶ R.M.A. Hankey, 'Memorandum respecting Danzig and the Polish Corridor', 1 February 1933. CAB 104/55.

³²⁷ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³²⁸ S.A.H. (no name given) 'Poland, Germany, and Danzig', *Bulletin of International News*, 16 (1939) pp.3-13, p.7.

Poland.³²⁹ Despite these concerns the Polish Government, led by Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, adopted a cautious policy towards Danzig after Hitler came to power in 1933, knowing that Hitler would have to consolidate his power in Germany before making any demands regarding the Free City.³³⁰ What Warsaw did not understand, and neither did London, Paris nor Geneva³³¹, was that Forster since becoming *Gauleiter* had reformed, reorganised and strengthened the NSDAP that would quickly capitalise on Hitler's ascension to power in Berlin.

Early Successes for the NSDAP

Before the 28 May 1933 Volkstag elections the NSDAP had steadily been gaining seats, mirroring the electoral successes of the NSDAP in the Reich before March 1933. The first elections the Danzig Nazis contested under Forster's leadership were on 16 November 1930 where the NSDAP won 16 percent of the popular vote with twelve out of seventy-two seats in the Volkstag.³³² The NSDAP's electoral gains in 1930 cemented Forster's authority over his rivals amongst the Danzig Nazis and reinforced Hitler's confidence in him. Official statistics published by the Danzig NSDAP state that the membership of the Party grew from 800 in June 1930 to over 9,500 by December 1932, and the Party moved its headquarters to the centre of Danzig's business and shopping district, demonstrating the financial resources they had gained as a result of this electoral gain.³³³ Greiser led the Nazi contingent in the Volkstag and his verbal attacks on Liberals, Poles and Marxists won him, and the NSDAP, allies and supporters amongst the other German Nationalist parties in the Volkstag.³³⁴ On 28 May 1933, less than five months after Hitler was appointed Chancellor, the NSDAP won the Volkstag elections outright with 50.03 percent of the popular vote which translated into thirty-eight out of seventy-two seats.³³⁵ Kimmich makes an interesting note, in the 5 March 1933 Reichstag elections in Germany the NSDAP, whose leader was Chancellor, won 43.9 percent of the vote.³³⁶ Kimmich puts this down to a greater feeling of German nationalism amongst the Danzigers, high unemployment and tensions with Poland.³³⁷

³²⁹ Minute by Lieutenant-Colonel E.R. Sword, Military Attaché at UK Warsaw Embassy, 9 May 1939, in UK Warsaw Embassy to FO, 17 May 1939. CAB 104/55.

³³⁰ Kimmich, *The Free City*, p.129.

³³¹ N.B. The League of Nations was headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. 'Geneva' will be used as shorthand for the League of Nations just as 'London' or 'Berlin' are used as shorthand for the British and German Governments respectively.

³³² Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.34 and p.40.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p.35.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43.

³³⁵ Kimmich, *The Free City*, p.139.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.139.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.139

Hermann Rauschning became the first NSDAP Senate President and Greiser served as his deputy and Senator for the Interior which gave the NSDAP control of the Danzig Police.³³⁸ However both men were subordinate to *Gauleiter* Forster who had been given total authority over the Danzig Nazis, an example of the *Führerprinzip* where a selected official held power over an elected one in the Nazi hierarchy due to his relationship with the Führer. Despite winning an absolute majority in the Volkstag the NSDAP couldn't turn Danzig into an outright Nazi state, the Constitution was guaranteed by the League, required a two-thirds vote in the Volkstag before it could be changed and there was always the threat of Polish and/or League intervention.³³⁹ Instead the NSDAP was going to have to Nazify Danzig by stealth without provoking Geneva or Warsaw. On 24 June 1933 the Volkstag voted the Senate emergency powers, much like the 24 March 1933 Enabling Act granted Hitler emergency powers in Germany, by a vote of fifty to nineteen.³⁴⁰ The Nazis claimed that the powers were necessary for them to rectify Danzig's crippling economic problems, including its high unemployment rate, however that went hand in hand with the transformation of Danzig into a Nazi state.

Consolidating Power

The main threat to the NSDAP's early successes in Danzig was intervention by Poland. Berlin knew that the Poles had a large, well-equipped army that outnumbered the *Reichswehr* and that, if provoked by the new Nazi Government in Danzig, could easily overrun and occupy the city. Hitler knew he had to placate Warsaw, which would secure his eastern border and give the Danzig Nazis greater freedom in which to operate, acting as the sponsor to his fifth column. At the same time the Polish Government were wary of Hitler's intentions and sought to directly negotiate with him, spurred on by his Foreign Minister, Jozef Beck, Pilsudski negotiated the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact on 26 January 1934.³⁴¹ Hitler also sought to use this agreement to prove to the Poles that he had no designs on Danzig or the Corridor, stating in an interview with the *Daily Mail* on 6 August 1934:

On our eastern frontier I have proved our peaceful intentions by making a pact with Poland.³⁴²

³³⁸ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.57 and p.59.

³³⁹ FO to UK Embassy Warsaw, 9 November 1936. CAB 104/55.

³⁴⁰ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.67.

³⁴¹ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/55 and Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.61 and p.64.

³⁴² 'Extracts from Speeches of and Press Interviews with German Minister on the aims of German Foreign Policy, May 1934 to January 1936' in A. Eden, 'German Minister's Speeches. May 1934 to January 1936', 10 February 1936. CAB 24/260/4.

With the immediate threat of Polish intervention nullified and a host of Polish-Danzig disputes rectified with the 1934 Pact, the Danzig Nazis had free reign to remove their rivals in the city, including opposition parties and the League's High Commissioner, Sean Lester.

The Nazis first targeted their political opponents in Danzig using violence and intimidation with SA and SS men. For example a 700 strong meeting of the German National Party on 12 June 1936 was attacked by plainclothed Nazis after the police had been ordered to keep away from the meeting, thirty-two people were injured and one SA man died, two days later two SS men were killed in a fight with the Social Democrats.³⁴³ The funerals of the three Nazi men were attended by Himmler, flags were lowered to half-mast and memorial services were held across the city, the Danzig Nazis had new martyrs and were prepared to use to apparatus of state to advance their aims.³⁴⁴ On 7 April 1935 fresh Volkstag elections were held where the Nazis achieved 59 percent of the vote and 43 seats, as they cracked down on opposition parties several Volkstag deputies defected to the NSDAP or were removed from their seats on dubious charges by the NSDAP.³⁴⁵ Despite this second electoral success the Nazis were still short of the two-thirds majority, 48 seats, required to change the Danzig Constitution so they resorted to repression to eliminate their opposition.³⁴⁶

Empowered by the emergency powers of 1933 the Senate passed new decrees from the July 1936 to February 1937 repressing any opposition. A decree of 16 July empowered the police to arrest anyone suspect of a political offence and keep them in protective custody for three months without a trial, several opposition deputies in the Volkstag found themselves victim of this decree.³⁴⁷ On 11 January another decree extended the length of protective custody for political offenders from three months to indefinitely and on 4 February a decree declared that any Volkstag deputy who failed to fulfil his duties, such as by fleeing abroad or being in police protective custody, would be stripped of their seat.³⁴⁸ The Nazi repression of any official opposition was completed on 1 November 1937 when the Senate passed a decree banning the formation of any new political parties, threatening three years imprisonment for those who dared.³⁴⁹ Through these methods the

³⁴³ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 7 July 1936. CAB 104/55.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Memorandum by His Majesty's Consul-General at Danzig on the Situation in the Free City, 19 October 1937. CAB 104/55, and Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, pp.85-86.

³⁴⁶ FO Minute, 'Danzig Affairs', 16 June 1938. FO 371/21802.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 10 November 1937. CAB 104/55.

Nazis usurped more seats in the Volkstag and by October 1937 had 51 seats, more than the two-thirds required to change the Constitution.³⁵⁰

The final obstacle to the Danzig Nazis was the League High Commissioner, Irish diplomat Sean Lester, who remained the sole counter to outright Nazification of Danzig. Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935 provided the perfect distraction for the Danzig Nazis, with the League occupied with Italy they would not be able to lend their full support to Lester and Forster and Greiser were able to steadily subvert him.³⁵¹ Forster dealt the death-blow to Lester by publically attacking him in a speech on 16 June 1936 blaming him for creating disputes between Germany and Poland over Danzig, agitating against NSDAP rule and allowing disorder to run rampant by hampering Nazi policies.³⁵² Combined with an inflammatory speech by Greiser in Geneva on 4 July 1936 Lester's position was unattainable and he resigned his post on 5 October 1936.³⁵³ Lester's successor, Swiss diplomat Carl Burckhardt, was unable to stem the Nazification of Danzig with the UK Consul-General writing in October 1937:

The High Commissioner's policy has been to try to re-establish within the limits of what is now possible the contact between the League and Danzig which was almost lost through the events of 1936. In order to do so he has let the Nazis do virtually as they like in constitutional matters.³⁵⁴

On 10 October 1937 Forster gave a speech saying that since Lester's resignation the NSDAP had kept order in Danzig without further intervention from the League and Burckhardt's only job was to preserve the well-being of *German* Danzig.³⁵⁵ In speech on 19 January 1938 Greiser referred to the German State of Danzig and that his government ran the city on Nazi principles to achieve success and solidarity independent of the League.³⁵⁶ Despite the blatant Nazification of Danzig the British Government was not prepared to counter it, with Eden telling Henderson on 15 July 1937 that it was government policy not to interfere in Danzig's internal affairs as it would sour Anglo-German relations.³⁵⁷ The fifth column was deliberately allowed to turn Danzig into a mini-Reich.

³⁵⁰ Memorandum by His Majesty's Consul-General at Danzig on the Situation in the Free City, 19 October 1937. CAB 104/55.

³⁵¹ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.110.

³⁵² UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 7 July 1936. CAB 104/5.

³⁵³ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.117 and p.119.

³⁵⁴ Memorandum by His Majesty's Consul-General at Danzig on the Situation in the Free City, 19 October 1937. CAB 104/55.

³⁵⁵ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 12 October 1937. CAB 104/5.

³⁵⁶ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 19 January 1938. FO 371/21800.

³⁵⁷ FO to UK Embassy Berlin, 15 July 1937 in A. Eden 'Anglo-German Relations', 30 July 1937. CAB 24/271/2.

'A microcosm of the Reich'

It was true that Danzig was separated from the Reich but it was also a fact that the population had the same faith in Hitler as the inhabitants of the Reich ... For the German nation Danzig was always ready to make any sacrifice.³⁵⁸

Forster declared in a Berlin speech on 18 January 1938 marking the increased *Gleichschaltung* between Danzig and Germany, beginning with the amalgamation of the Danzig SS, SA, NSDAP, NSKK and NSFK with their East Prussian counterparts in the winter of 1937/38.³⁵⁹ A labour camp was opened in August 1938, ostensibly to further reduce unemployment but there were rumours that 2,800 German political prisoners were imprisoned there and in a speech to the NSDAP leaders on 3 October Forster stated that 2,000 Jews had left Danzig since October 1937 and new laws would be introduced enhance *Gleichschaltung* with Germany.³⁶⁰ Anti-Semitic propaganda and policies intensified in Danzig until 9 November where, mirroring Germany, the city exploded into an orgy of violence, arson, looting and repression against Danzig's Jewish population.³⁶¹ As a comparison to the Kristallnacht in Germany, which lasted one night, the Danzig pogrom lasted four days, with many of the city's Jews placed in 'labour' camps outside the city and Forster announced that legal measures against the Jews would be enacted.³⁶² On 23 November the infamous Nuremberg Laws³⁶³ were enacted in Danzig, bringing the city's legal system in line with Germany's.³⁶⁴

With the Danzig Kristallnacht and the adoption of the Nuremberg Laws the Nazification of Danzig was complete to which an FO Memorandum later stated; "the Free City internally is virtually a microcosm of the Reich."³⁶⁵ On 31 December 1938 Forster gave an address where he summarised the *Gleichschaltung* of Danzig:

We have done away with the parties and have created solidarity among the Germans ... We have, to the utmost of our ability, assimilated the internal life of Danzig and its laws to those

³⁵⁸ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 19 January 1938. FO 371/21800.

³⁵⁹ FO Minute, 'Danzig Affairs', 16 June 1938. FO 371/21802.

³⁶⁰ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 26 August 1938 and UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 6 October 1938. FO 371/21803.

³⁶¹ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 18 November 1938. CAB 104/5.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ N.B. Nuremberg Laws had been enforced in Germany since September 1935.

³⁶⁴ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.134.

³⁶⁵ FO Memorandum, 'The Danzig Question', 15 May 1939. CAB 104/5.

of the Reich. We have ... taken up the Jewish problem ... and are engaged in effect a final solution of it.³⁶⁶

German-Polish relations in Danzig quickly soured with violent incidents between the two groups becoming increasingly common, the most noticeable was between 24-27 February 1939 at the Danzig Polytechnic where German students, wearing Nazi uniforms, forcibly ejected Polish students many of whom were immediately arrested by the Danzig Police.³⁶⁷ The incident was sparked by the Polish Students Society stating that 'only the Polish nation had the right to control the mouth of the Vistula', which resulted in a diplomatic incident between Danzig and Poland that was only resolved when on 27 February Warsaw publicly disassociated itself from the statement of its own students.³⁶⁸ *Danziger Vorposten*³⁶⁹ further stirred up anti-Polish sentiment in Danzig by giving prominence to German-Polish incidents provoked by Poles and ignored those instigated by Germans.³⁷⁰ The continuation of German-Polish incidents, and Geneva and Warsaw's failure to prevent them, led to Kennard to report in May 1939:

The Nazification of Danzig and the impotence of [Burckhardt] have subsequently altered the balance to Poland's detriment, albeit with her tacit consent. In the Free State territory the Nazi Party are the oppressors and not the oppressed.³⁷¹

Coinciding of the final disillusion of Czechoslovakia and Hitler making territorial demands of Poland, the NSDAP began the militarisation of Danzig by proxy.³⁷² Executive Order 103 armed a hundred, potentially thousands, of NSDAP members including SS, SA, NSKK, NSFK and HJ officers.³⁷³ The NSDAP had also established an auxiliary *schutzpolizei*³⁷⁴ equipped with modern weapons including machine-guns, rifles and armoured cars and which all men between 18 and 25 were liable to be conscripted into and those between 25 and 50 were automatically placed on the *schutzpolizei*

³⁶⁶ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 4 January 1939. FO 371/23132.

³⁶⁷ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 27 February 1939 and UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 28 February 1939. FO 371/23133.

³⁶⁸ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 27 February 1939 and UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 13 March 1939. FO 371/23133.

³⁶⁹ N.B. *Danziger Vorposten* was the official daily newspaper of the Free City but was quickly transformed into NSDAP's propaganda organ as the Nazi's cemented their power on the city.

³⁷⁰ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 15 April 1939. FO 371/23134.

³⁷¹ UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 17 May 1939. CAB 104/5.

³⁷² N.B. The term 'militarisation by proxy' is used in the context of the increased arming of NSDAP organisations in Danzig, e.g. SS and SA, as the 1922 Constitution established Danzig as a demilitarised city with no standing army and only a police force to maintain internal security.

³⁷³ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 17 March 1939. FO 371/23133.

³⁷⁴ N.B. Security Police.

reserves.³⁷⁵ Both the British and Polish Consul-Generals in Danzig saw the *schutzpolizei* as indistinguishable from soldiers as they wore near-identical uniforms of the *Wehrmacht* and undertook military exercises along the Danzig-Polish border.³⁷⁶ Gerald Shepherd, the UK Consul-General in Danzig, even noted that the 1,000 SS-men, 4,000 SA-men and NSKK³⁷⁷ were armed with rifles that “appeared to be brand new”, believing, as many did, that Germany was smuggling weapons into Danzig and there were secret weapon caches throughout the city, there were also rumours of 37mm infantry guns being smuggled in from East Prussia.³⁷⁸ Many young Danzigers also performed their military service in the *Wehrmacht* before returning, combined with the *schutzpolizei* and Nazi paramilitary organisations, the Danzig Nazis controlled a well-armed, well-trained and fanatically loyal fighting population that, in the event of war with Poland, could be used to hold out against a Polish attack until *Wehrmacht* relief arrived.³⁷⁹

By May 1939 the British had realised Germany’s intentions regarding Danzig and the Corridor after Hitler annexed the remains of Czechoslovakia, breaking his Munich promise, and saw the militarisation of Danzig as a tangible threat to Polish sovereignty and peace:

If the Nazis militarise Danzig they will have a stranglehold on the Corridor.³⁸⁰

August to September 1939 – Invasion and the Second World War

German-Polish relations deteriorated in the aftermath of the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the subsequent German-Slovak Treaty as Berlin issued three demands to Warsaw; the return of Danzig to Germany, an extra-territorial communications line across the Polish Corridor and for Poland to align its foreign policy with Germany.³⁸¹ Unlike Austria and Czechoslovakia, who buckled under German demands, Poland stood firm as Kennard reported back to London after a conversation with Beck:

[Beck] added categorically that should Germany occupy Danzig, Poland would fight.³⁸²

London and Warsaw saw the fates of Danzig, the Corridor and European peace were intertwined and that if one should fall to Hitler it would start a domino effect that would result in an invasion of

³⁷⁵ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, ‘Report on Military Organisations in Danzig’, 25 April 1939. FO 371/23134.

³⁷⁶ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, ‘Report on Military Organisations in Danzig’, 25 April 1939. FO 371/23134.

³⁷⁷ N.B. Strength of NSKK (and NSFK) not reported in dispatch.

³⁷⁸ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, ‘Report on Military Organisations in Danzig’, 25 April 1939. FO 371/23134.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ FO Memorandum, ‘The Danzig Question’, 15 May 1939. CAB 104/5.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 17 March 1939. FO 371/23133.

Poland and wider European conflagration, something that had been narrowly avoided at the Munich Conference. Chamberlain's guarantee to Poland on 31 March 1939 was an attempt to rein in Hitler but the effect in Danzig was to make both sides more resolute.³⁸³ Poland reasserted that any attempt to alter Danzig's status would be met with armed resistance and Nazi propaganda in Danzig vehemently denounced Britain and Poland with *Danziger Vorposten* encouraged Danzigers to publically show their affection for the NSDAP and celebrate the annexation of Czechoslovakia.³⁸⁴ The Danzig Nazis attempted to goad Poland into action by attacking Polish Customs inspectors in Nazi uniforms, highlighting German-Polish incidents however trivial and holding mass rallies with the support of 6,000 SA men from East Prussia.³⁸⁵ By now London had learnt that Hitler could no longer be trusted as Harvey noted in his diary:

All German propaganda is now making out Danzig as a special and isolated claim, while we know after Czechoslovakia that it is only the first step to the weakening and partition of Poland.³⁸⁶

Poland would not be goaded into taking aggressive measures by NSDAP's agitations, as they saw the German-Slovak Treaty as a threat to their southern flank as German fortifications in Slovakia were directed towards Poland.³⁸⁷ With German forces on her southern, western and northern frontier (via East Prussia) Warsaw was not in the position to be the aggressor and instead relied on her guarantees with Britain and France to keep Germany at bay. Kennard believed there were only three possible scenarios for the future of Danzig, as it was clear that Germany would not back down: Either the Danzig Senate would issue a desire for a return to Germany without public support from Berlin; or Berlin would publically support the Senate's desire with military or non-military measures; or Berlin would demand the return of Danzig with the threat of military action.³⁸⁸ As with Austria and Czechoslovakia the impetus for change would come from Hitler and he had utilised his fifth column extremely effectively in Danzig to create tensions with Poland and justify war.

By late August 1939 the world was set for war. In Danzig on 23 August Forster was elevated to the new position of *Staatsoberhaupt* (Chief of State), side-lining his rival Greiser and the Danzig

³⁸³ N.B. The British Guarantee to Poland was made simultaneously with the French stating if Germany attacked Poland Britain and France would declare war on Germany in Poland's defence.

³⁸⁴ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 4 April 1939. FO 371/23134.

³⁸⁵ UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 31 May 1939. CAB 104/5 and UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 10 May 1939. FO 371/23135 and UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 3 June 1939. FO 371/23135.

³⁸⁶ '7 May 1939 Entry', J. Harvey (ed.) *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940* (London, 1970) p.288.

³⁸⁷ UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 6 May 1939. CAB 104/5.

³⁸⁸ UK Embassy Warsaw to FO, 25 March 1939. FO 371/23134.

Senate making him the mini-Reich's mini-Führer.³⁸⁹ This has parallels with Seyss-Inquart's appointment as Austrian Chancellor for two days in March 1938, in each case NSDAP had one of their supporters in a position of total authority who would formalise the annexation of each territory, acting as the indigenous Nazi who was returning his land and people into the embraces of the Reich. On 25 August *Kriegsmarine* cruiser *Schleswig-Holstein* arrived in Danzig and at 4:45am on 1 September opened fire on Polish defences on Westerplatte³⁹⁰ and NSDAP Danzig paramilitary forces quickly occupied Polish installations and facilities in the city and Forster officially returned the city to Germany on 2 September.³⁹¹

Overview

The Danzig fifth column was to be the last of Germany's effective fifth column movements. By copying the NSDAP's successes in the Reich and removing opponents piecemeal, including the League of Nations, the Nazis were able to easily facilitate Danzig's return to Germany and war with Poland. The Danzig Nazis perhaps best fit the description of a parasite, their power grew like a cancer and rotted the Free City from within, destroying the Constitution, neutering the League of Nations and slowly militarising the city, until they had created a perfect storm by antagonising Poland that Hitler could justify the great war he always dreamed of.

In Berlin Hitler used the bombastic language and threat of provoking a European war that he had used with Austria and Czechoslovakia in an attempt to deter British (and French) intervention. However he had cried wolf too many times, broken too many promises and by the beginning of September 1939 the British rearmament programme had been completed in the eleven month breathing space afforded to it by Munich. Britain and France jointly declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939 and Hitler had what he always feared, a war on two fronts.

After their experiences and failures in Austria, Czechoslovakia and now Danzig, the British had learned plenty about how these organisations manifest and conduct themselves. With the dawning of the Second World War Britain was able to take a more aggressive and intrusive policy towards future German fifth columns in Iraq and Iran, not having to care for the delicate diplomatic protocols that they had before the war, and instead acting on military necessity.

³⁸⁹ UK Consulate Danzig to FO, 24 August 1939. FO 371/23135.

³⁹⁰ N.B. The Battle of Westerplatte was the opening battle of the Second World War where 182 Polish soldiers and 27 reservists fought from 1-7 September to defend the small Polish Military Transit Deposit base on the Westerplatte Peninsular in Danzig's harbour against a force of approximately 3,400 Germans. For more on the Battle refer to C. Mann, *Great Battles of World War II* (Bath, 2008), pp.10-17.

³⁹¹ Levine, *Hitler's Free City*, p.153.



The opening shots of the Second World War.

'*Schleswig-Holstein* bombarding Westerplatte, Danzig, 1 September 1939'. Source, World War II Database, http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=1835 Accessed 29 October 2015.

CHAPTER V – IRAQ “Gilded with Axis gold”

[The] Golden Square [is] gilded with Axis gold ... [The] military leaders and Rashid Ali know that their necks are forfeit if the Regent returns to power, and the Axis agents are goading them into action.³⁹²

RAF command in Iraq wrote four days after a military-political coup in Baghdad where the pro-British government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said was replaced by the pro-German regime of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. Rashid Ali's government was supported by a cabal of four military officers known as the Golden Square, led by Salah ad-Din al-Sabbagh, and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini.³⁹³ The Golden Square were the true power within domestic Iraqi politics and had engineered the downfall of numerous Iraqi governments who tried to limit their power. Rashid Ali and his civilian government were to be their political puppets and give an aura of constitutional legitimacy to a military takeover. The Golden Square and Rashid Ali were also intensely nationalistic, blending an ideology of Pan-Arabism, Sunni Islam, fascism, anti-Semitism and anti-Imperialism into an anti-British and pro-German sentiment whose political philosopher was al-Husseini who had already stirred up this ideology into rebellion during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt in the British Mandate of Palestine. The Iraqi fifth column were like the Slovak fifth column, an indigenous organisation that sought to place itself at the behest of the German Government to achieve the same political ends, in this case to take Iraq out of the British fold and place it within the German fold under its support and protection. However, unlike the Slovak fifth column, and the other previous cases already examined in this essay, the Iraqi fifth column takes place within the paradigm of the Second World War. Britain no longer had need of diplomatic niceties, international obligations or long-term effects to consider before attempting to counter the fifth column. Britain had but one objective, 'win the war', and some argue that 'by any means necessary' be added to that task. Now under Churchill's decisive, firm and belligerent leadership, unlike Chamberlain's sober, careful and conciliatory one, the British were prepared to take aggressive action against the Iraqi fifth column, refusing to allow a cabal of ideologues to hamstring the war effort in the Middle East and deliver the Germans a key strategic pivot in the heart of the British Empire.

³⁹² Air Headquarters Iraq to Air Ministry, 7 April 1941. FO 371/27064.

³⁹³ N.B. A Mufti is an Islamic scholar who interprets Islamic law and issues legal opinions, *fatwas*, within Sunni Islam. A Grand Mufti is the highest legal authority within Sunni Islamic law. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem was responsible for Jerusalem's Islamic holy places such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina, and the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount.

This chapter will examine the Iraqi fifth column in five sections: First, the context of the Kingdom of Iraq and its relations with Britain and Germany. Secondly, the key figures within the fifth column, the Golden Square, the Grand Mufti and Rashid Ali, their backgrounds, motivations and plans. Third, how the fifth column leaders sought to court German support and Germany's response before their coup. Fourthly, the coup of 3 April 1941 that brought Rashid Ali to power and the Anglo-Iraqi War of 2-31 May 1941. Finally how Germany responded to the April coup and subsequent war with Britain, what support they lent to the fifth column and, if at all, how effective it was.

Iraq, Britain and Germany

The Kingdom of Iraq formally became an independent state in 1932 after first being a British Mandate carved out from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. The 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that transformed the Kingdom from a mandate into a sovereign state, but it allowed Britain to exercise indirect control over Iraq's domestic politics, foreign policy, military, economy and perhaps most importantly, oil.³⁹⁴ Britain was allowed to retain its RAF bases and maintain transit rights for its armed forces across Iraq in addition to controlling the Iraqi military and supplying it's weaponry. The treaty would become a sticking point between the Iraqi political elite, who saw both personal and national advantages to being under British influence, and Arab nationalists, to whom the treaty was both embarrassing and insulting and they desired the creation of a single, unified pan-Arab state in the Middle East, instead of the patchwork of artificial nation states under the sway of the British and French Empires.

One of the most prominent pro-British politicians was Nuri al-Said who served in various cabinet posts and from 1930-1958 would be Iraqi Prime Minister eight times. He was aware that any government's ability to rule Iraq was tenuous and that British support was required to add order into Iraq's chaotic political system, where governments formed and collapsed within months and even weeks. From 1938-1941 al-Said would be the most vocal proponent of a pro-German fifth column in Iraq, in the knowledge that his rule would be strengthened if London believed in a German plot against Britain.³⁹⁵ Churchill was incredibly receptive to al-Said's warnings about a German fifth column in Iraq; Germany had tried to stir up anti-British sentiment amongst the Empire's Muslim populace in the First World War and Churchill himself had seen during the Mahdist War (1881-1899) in Sudan³⁹⁶ how Islam could be used to crystallise an anti-Imperialist coalition.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.14.

³⁹⁵ J. Cole, 'Iraq in 1939: British Alliance or Nationalist Neutrality towards the Axis?', *Britain and the World*, 5 (2012), pp.204-222, p.210.

³⁹⁶ N.B. The Mahdist War, also known as the Anglo-Sudanese War or the Mahdist Revolt (1881-1899), in Sudan was between Anglo-Egyptian forces against Islamic Sudanese forces for control of the country. Winston Churchill was a young Army officer at the time and participated in the conflict. After Churchill wrote a history

With the advent of the Second World War Germany tried to continue this *Kaiserreich* policy of courting Islam, by highlighting that both Islam and Nazism shared common enemies, the USSR, the British Empire and the Jews, and tried to stir up Muslim populations in both the British Empire and Soviet Union into open rebellion.³⁹⁸ Compared to Britain, and many other European nations, Germany exerted little influence in the Middle East, although under the Nazis trade with Muslim nations like Turkey, Iraq and Iran had increased but they were unable to break the British trade monopoly on the region.³⁹⁹ Many within the German Government were also totally disinterested in fostering any relations within the Middle East for a variety of reasons; before Munich they were still trying to court Britain and didn't want to provoke any tensions over British influence in the Middle East and the 1936 Italo-German Agreement left the Middle East and the Mediterranean within the Italian sphere of influence.⁴⁰⁰ The Italians were deeply unpopular in the Middle East for several reasons, including Italy's harsh rule of Libya and the Abyssinian War, many Arab leaders had no wish to remove the British only to have them replaced by the Italians.⁴⁰¹ The British were especially concerned about Italian designs on the Middle East, and German facilitation of those designs, as the Italians had sponsored the Arab Revolt,⁴⁰² and as the Italians fell increasingly under German influence during the course of the war London warned Baghdad that the Italian Legation should be seen as a German substitute.⁴⁰³

However Germany did have support from some sections of Iraqi society; many senior Iraqi officers had formerly been part of the Ottoman Military and had been trained by *Reichswehr* officers before and during World War One.⁴⁰⁴ By World War Two many of these officers were in politically powerful positions in Iraq and were highly receptive of Germany's anti-Imperialist attitude regarding the Middle East, believing that the Germans would help them expel the British and act as a restraint on the Italians.⁴⁰⁵ A CSC memorandum in June 1940 wrote:

Anti-British feeling runs high, particularly among the younger officers. There are doubts as to the loyalty of the Army in an emergency and German exploits do more than merely evoke

on the British involvement in the war in his 1899 book, *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of Soudan*.

³⁹⁷ D. Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 2014,) p.7.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p.3 and p.1.

³⁹⁹ L. Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London, 1966), p.16.

⁴⁰⁰ Hirszowicz, *Arab East*, p. 39, and Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.19.

⁴⁰¹ Cole, 'Iraq in 1939', pp.212-213.

⁴⁰² For more on Italian involvement in the Arab Revolt refer to N. Arielli, 'Italian Involvement in the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35 (2008), pp.187-204.

⁴⁰³ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 21 March 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴⁰⁴ R.S. Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology* (New York, 1985), pp.xi-xii.

⁴⁰⁵ Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, pp.33-34.

admiration. There are reports of Fifth Column organisation, though these reports do not give precise information on the size or power of such an organisation as exists.⁴⁰⁶

By December 1940 the British received their first solid evidence on German designs on Iraq and how they planned to use their fifth column after the Iraqi Charge d'Affaires in the Tehran Legation informed the British of the activities of a German agent known as 'Mayr'. Mayr sought to make contact with known anti-British and pro-German Iraqis from a list provided by Fritz Grobba, the former German Minister to Baghdad, and mentioned that Germany would prefer a political coup in Iraq over sabotage, terrorism and insurrection.⁴⁰⁷

The Most Dangerous Men in the Middle East

At the end of the Anglo-Iraqi War many of the fifth column leaders fled to neighbouring Iran. The FO sent a telegram to Sir Reader Bullard, the UK Minister in Tehran, where they listed the fifth column leaders, the Grand Mufti, the Golden Square and Rashid Ali, as the most dangerous individuals to British interests in the Middle East.⁴⁰⁸

The Grand Mufti was, to all intents and purposes, public enemy number one to the British Empire in the Middle East. He had played a key role in the Arab Revolt which was instigated by the Arab Higher Committee, which he chaired, and was ostensibly in response to Jewish immigration into Palestine under British auspices.⁴⁰⁹ After the Arab Revolt was suppressed and he fled to Iraq he acted as a crystallising factor in Baghdad drawing together Rashid Ali and his political cronies and the Golden Square with their domestic military might. Al-Husseini was definitely an extremist ideologue who despised the British presence in the Middle East and saw Nazi Germany as a powerful ally who would help him achieve his own ends. As far as he was concerned from 1939 to 1941 the USSR, Japan and Italy all supported Germany against the imperialist powers in the Middle East, Britain and France, and therefore the Arab peoples should support the Axis powers too, even if they feared Italian designs on the Middle East.⁴¹⁰ Al-Husseini arrived in Baghdad in October 1939 where the Iraqi Parliament voted to give him a salary and pay for his personal expenses, using Iraqi taxpayers'

⁴⁰⁶ 'Memorandum by the Chief of Staff Committee' in Chief of Staff Committee, 'Internal Security in Iraq', 14 June 1940. CAB 66/8/35.

⁴⁰⁷ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 30 December 1940. FO 371/27087. Transmitted copy of letter from CJ Edmonds a British advisor to the Iraqi Interior Minister describing a talk he had with the Iraqi Charge d'Affaires at the Iraqi Legation in Tehran, Colonel Shakir al-Wadi, during his recent visit to Baghdad.

⁴⁰⁸ FO to UK Legation Tehran, 31 May 1941. FO 371/27073.

⁴⁰⁹ Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p17.

⁴¹⁰ Hirszcwicz, *Arab East*, p.68.

money.⁴¹¹ He pledged to al-Said's government that he would refrain from entering Iraqi politics during his stay in Baghdad. However he quickly attracted the attention of the fiercely nationalist al-Sabbagh and the Golden Square who saw the Grand Mufti as an Arab nationalist hero for his role in the Arab Revolt.⁴¹²

The Golden Square consisted of four Iraqi generals who controlled the Iraqi military, and by extension Iraqi politics by engineering a series of military coups and shifting their allegiances between different political factions. The Golden Square consisted of Salah ad-Din al Sabbagh, the commander of the 3rd Division, Jamal Shabib, the commander of the 1st Division, Mahmud Salman, the commander of Iraq's only mechanised brigade and Fahmi Said, the commander of the RIAF.⁴¹³ These four men came from similar backgrounds, they were lower-middle class and had joined the Ottoman Army as officers for educational, career social and financial advancement before forming the backbone of the new Iraqi Officer Corps after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹⁴ They directly controlled half of Iraq's military and practiced cronyism to control the other half, with men in position of power not based on merit but loyalty to the Golden Square.⁴¹⁵ As one Baghdad Embassy report stated:

There are also junior officers who for a variety of reasons support the political adventures of [the Golden Square] and Fahmi Said is said to have taken pains to introduce into units under his command officers of bad character over whom he has personal command.⁴¹⁶

Al-Sabbagh emerged as the leader of this military clique and guided it with his own political philosophy. He himself was half-Iraqi and half-Lebanese and was a fervent Pan-Arabist who dreamed of a unified Arab State free from Western imperial influences, an ideology he shared with the Grand Mufti whom he treated as a political grandfather.⁴¹⁷ An Embassy report stated that Al-Sabbagh and the Golden Square were motivated by extreme Arab nationalism that could only be realised by a German victory in a war against Britain, and that this notion was advocated by the Grand Mufti whilst he guested in Baghdad.⁴¹⁸ However Al-Sabbagh wrote in *al-Urubah fi al-Iraq*, his own political memoir, that he was guided by only two things, his nation and his faith:

⁴¹¹ D. Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York, 1986), p.109.

⁴¹² Cole, 'Iraq in 1939', p.220.

⁴¹³ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 11 February 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴¹⁴ Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, p.131.

⁴¹⁵ Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire*, p.121.

⁴¹⁶ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 11 February 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴¹⁷ M. Tarbush, *Military in Politics*, pp.164-166.

⁴¹⁸ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 11 February 1941. FO 371/27062.

I do not believe in the democracy of the English nor the Nazism of the Germans nor the Bolshevism of the Russians. I am an Arab Muslim. I do not want anything as a substitute in the way of pretensions and philosophies.⁴¹⁹

In this regard Al-Sabbagh shared a lot in common with Jozef Tiso of the HSL and the Slovak fifth column: Both placed nation and faith at the core of their ideologies and turned to Hitler's Germany, a strong and dynamic power, to achieve their own agendas. By turning to Germany for assistance the British were able to paint the Golden Square as a 'pro-German gang' in their propaganda and internal correspondence, who cared nothing for the Iraqi people and instead only for selfish advancement at the heels of their masters in Berlin.⁴²⁰

The final fifth column leader was Rashid Ali al-142Gaylani, the man who would become the public, political and, as far as the fifth column was concerned, legitimate face of post-British Iraq. Unlike the Golden Square he did not have a military background and instead had been part of the Ottoman judicial system, a professor at the Baghdad School of Law and his first cabinet post in 1924 was as Justice Minister.⁴²¹ Rashid Ali was without doubt al-Said's greatest political rival with each man representing the anti and pro-British factions in Iraqi politics respectively. Shortly after the beginning of the Anglo-Iraqi War Sir Miles Lampson, the UK Ambassador to Cairo, sent a draft statement on Rashid Ali to the FO for BBC Arabic to use in an official propaganda broadcast. In his draft he said of him:

No one trusts him. Some fear him. All hate him, except Iraq's enemies ...⁴²²

The Iraqi fifth column finally came together on 28 February 1941 in the Grand Mufti's Baghdad residence. General Taha al-Hashimi, the former Chief of the General Staff, and current Prime Minister, was seen by many, both British and Iraqi, to be of dull personality and low intellect but was Britain's best chance of curtailing the Golden Square's power.⁴²³ The fifth column leaders saw him as nothing more than a British stooge and that his attempts to break off diplomatic relations with Italy were a symptom of his disloyalty to the pan-Arabist cause.⁴²⁴ After the meeting of the 28 February

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in, Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, p.133.

⁴²⁰ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 30 April 1941. FO 371/27067.

⁴²¹ Tarbush, *Military in Politics*, p.167-169.

⁴²² UK Embassy Cairo to FO, 2 May 1941. FO 371/27067.

⁴²³ Tarbush, *Military in Politics*, pp.172-173.

⁴²⁴ Tarbush, *Military in Politics*, p.173.

the fifth column leaders stepped up their attempts to court Germany in support of their planned coup.

Courting Germany

It is unknown if any of the Iraqi fifth column leaders fully understood Nazism and its adherents in Germany. *Mein Kampf* had limited print runs in Arabic with only a few hundred copies in each run and literacy rates across the Middle East were far lower than they were in the Europe.⁴²⁵ Hitler's racial hierarchy placed the Arabs above Slavs and Jews and the Nazis cared little for the future of the Arab peoples, seeing them as useful pawns in their clash of civilisations with the British Empire and the planned invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.⁴²⁶ By existing outside of Hitler's war plans the Arabs were never guaranteed strong support from Berlin, something that would later lead to the ruination of Rashid Ali, the Golden Square and the Grand Mufti. Many Arab nationalist felt that Germany was not the best choice of ally in their struggle against Britain; Hitler's occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and his unprovoked invasion of Poland revealed him for the habitual liar that he was, tarnishing his reputation in many eyes.⁴²⁷ For these pan-Arabists whilst British rule may be bad for the Arab peoples, it was far better to stick with the devil they knew than Hitler who may later chuck them to his Italian ally as a reward for their loyalty. However for the fifth column leaders Hitler's Germany was their only choice of recourse; only Germany was strong enough to drive the British from the Middle East and keep the Italians on a short leash.

The first contact between the Arab nationalists and the German Government came in July 1940 when Naji Shawkat, then Justice Minister and a protégée of Rashid Ali, travelled to Istanbul on the pretence of going for medical treatment.⁴²⁸ Using Rashid Ali's brother, Kamal, the Iraqi envoy to Turkey as a go-between, Shawkat met with the German Minister, Franz von Papen.⁴²⁹ Shawkat told von Papen that he recognised the Middle East was within the Italian sphere of influence, as per the Axis agreement, but asked for Germany to restrain her and influence her decisions. In return for Italian restraint and removing the British Shawkat promised von Papen that the Iraqi Army would support Germany, German-Iraqi diplomatic relations would be normalised and the introduction of anti-Jewish laws in Iraq.⁴³⁰ However the Arabs would need public assurances from both Rome and Berlin that they would not be supplanting one imperialist power in the Middle East with another, just as the British and French had supplanted the Ottomans after the First World War.

⁴²⁵ Cole, 'Iraq in 1939', p.215.

⁴²⁶ Hirszwicz, *Arab East*, p.85.

⁴²⁷ Cole, 'Iraq in 1939', p.220.

⁴²⁸ Hirszwicz, *Arab East*, p.79.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁴³⁰ C.J. Edmonds to UK Embassy Baghdad, 16 February 1941. FO 371/27063 and Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.38.

Shortly after Shawkat met with von Papen in Turkey, Uthman Kamal Haddad, the Grand Mufti's private secretary, met with Ernst von Weizsacker, the Secretary of State at the German Foreign Office, and Grobba in Berlin in October 1940.⁴³¹ Haddad claimed to speak on behalf of the Arab peoples as the Grand Mufti's personal representative and said that a rebellion in Iraq could tie down 30-40,000 British troops and that the cost of the rebellion could be split between the Arabs, Germany and Italy with the weapons supplied via Vichy Syria.⁴³² However like Shawkat, Haddad required public assurances from Germany and Italy, fearing that if not they would just be repeating the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided the Middle East between Britain and France.⁴³³

Public assurances came on 23 October 1940 in the form of the joint German-Italian Declaration, where they pledged their sympathy and support for the independence of the Arab peoples from their imperial masters.⁴³⁴ The British said that the declaration was vague propaganda designed to whip up the imagination of the Arab peoples to achieve German ends, as Churchill informed Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the new British Ambassador to Baghdad:

What guarantee ... except the armed forces of the British Empire is there ... against the incorporation of Palestine, Syria and Iraq, with her valuable oil, in an Italian colonial empire, where the Arab inhabitants would doubtless receive the same treatments as the Arabs in Libya? No declaration, no assurance by the German or Italian Governments can give Iraq security from such a fate. You can point out that the only country which had shown itself willing to maintain Iraqi independence is the UK, and that the true interests of Iraq obviously require a British victory.⁴³⁵

Despite existing outside of Hitler's world view, there were those in Berlin who saw the potential of the Arabs in their war against Britain. Ernst Woermann, the Under-Secretary of State at the German Foreign Office, published in March 1941 a memorandum where he spelled out his plans for using the Arabs against the British Empire. Woermann wanted the German Government to sever communications between India and the Mediterranean, deny strategic oilfields and keep the British Army occupied with internal policing as the *Wehrmacht* advanced on all fronts against them.⁴³⁶ A

⁴³¹ Hirszwicz, *Arab East*, p.82.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p.84.

⁴³³ Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.55.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁴³⁵ Churchill to UK Embassy Baghdad, 11 March 1941. FO 371/27061.

⁴³⁶ M. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936-42* (Basingstoke, 1999) p.154.

few days later on 11 March Weizsacker sent a letter to the Grand Mufti stating that Germany recognised the complete independence of the Arab peoples and would help them attain it.⁴³⁷

Despite containing no concrete proposals, which unnerved many nationalists, the fifth column leaders believed that Germany was waiting for them to take the initiative. German propaganda broadcasts in Iraq were well received and in the wider war Britain was on the back foot as German forces swarmed across North Africa and through Yugoslavia and Greece.⁴³⁸ The fifth columnists had courted promises of German support, now they threw themselves into a coup unknowing if these promises would manifest into action.

Baghdad Coup and the Anglo-Iraqi War

In February 1941 the British received intelligence about a potential coup in Iraq involving Rashid Ali, the Golden Square and the Grand Mufti and that the plotters would appeal for German support via the Italian Legation in Baghdad.⁴³⁹ However the coup was not to come until 1 April when Rashid Ali assumed the premiership of Iraq with the Golden Square's military support.⁴⁴⁰ Two proclamations were issued in the days after the coup, the first by the Chief of the General Staff and the second by Rashid Ali. They stated that a Government of National Defence would be formed under Rashid Ali's leadership and accused the Regent, Abd al-Ilah,⁴⁴¹ of trying to install himself as King of Iraq with British help and that the Army acted in the interests of all Iraq.⁴⁴² The Regent fled to Basra where Royal Navy warships and British troops maintained control of the vital seaport.⁴⁴³ In the aftermath of the coup Cornwallis told London to expect a huge influx of Germans into Iraq who would help Rashid Ali secure his regime and facilitate the normalisation of relations with Germany, he also said that Iraq would now "fall rapidly to Nazi influence" and called for Rashid Ali's overthrow.⁴⁴⁴ After meeting with Musa Shabandar, Rashid Ali's Foreign Minister, on 24 April Cornwallis reported that "this Government is obviously deeply committed to Germany."⁴⁴⁵

Despite launching a pro-German coup in Baghdad there is little evidence to suggest that the Germans were prepared for it. As Bullard informed Cornwallis of the reaction of Germans in Iran:

⁴³⁷ Hirszowicz, *Arab East*, p.129.

⁴³⁸ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 26 March 1941. FO 371/27067 and Hirszowicz, *Arab East*, p.140.

⁴³⁹ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 23 February 1941. FO 371/27061.

⁴⁴⁰ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 3 April 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴⁴¹ N.B. Abd al-Ilah became Regent of Iraq after the death of his brother King Ghazi in a car accident on 3 April 1939 leaving his then four year old son, Faisal II, King of Iraq; he reigned as Regent of Iraq from 4 April 1939 to 23 May 1953 when Faisal came to maturity.

⁴⁴² UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 4 April 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴⁴³ Lieutenant A. Graham, 'Account of the Iraq Revolt', May 1941. CAB 106/512.

⁴⁴⁴ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 5 April 1941. FO 371/27062.

⁴⁴⁵ UK Embassy Baghdad to FO, 25 April 1941. FO 371/27067.

Our evidence suggests Germans here were taken by surprise by the coup d'état.⁴⁴⁶

Iraq's neighbours, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia were also taken by surprise by the coup with Şükrü Saracoğlu, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ibn Saud, the Saudi King and even some pro-German Iranian ministers all unhappy at the prospect of a pro-Nazi Iraq on their doorsteps.⁴⁴⁷

British propaganda savagely attacked Rashid Ali, the Grand Mufti and the Golden Square. Alleging that he and the Grand Mufti were in Italian pay and that they cared only for themselves not for Iraq's safety which they were endangering by openly agitating against the British Empire.⁴⁴⁸ Lampson took an even more belligerent tone, as was his style, and suggested the following be used in a propaganda broadcast:

At this moment the people of Iraq are being ruled not constitutionally but by a gang of four generals and one ambitious politician, the generals ... all are traitors to their country which they are bringing to the verge of war with Iraq's oldest friend (Britain) ... The treacherous Rashid Ali has accepted both money and promises and he has been so effectively compromised by the Germans who are more than 1,000 miles away that he and the Golden Square have led out Iraq's noble army and brought the peaceful country to war. People of Iraq your army is being led against the powerful British forces by the treachery of five men.⁴⁴⁹

The British also drafted an address for the Regent of Iraq, against attacking the fifth columnists for the pain and suffering they were to bring down upon Iraq:

A group of military tyrants brought by foreign gold have by force trust me from my sacred duties as guardian of my nephew your beloved King ... Under their evil sway the noble land of Iraq had been poisoned by falsehood and lies and brought from the blessings of peace to the horrors of a venomous war.⁴⁵⁰

Rashid Ali ordered Iraqi Army troops to surround the RAF base at Habbaniya in an attempt to intimidate the British after reinforcements landed at Basra. Hostilities began on 2 May when Air

⁴⁴⁶ UK Legation Tehran to UK Embassy Baghdad, 10 April 1941. FO 371/27064.

⁴⁴⁷ UK Embassy Ankara to FO, 4 May 1941, and UK Legation Jeddah to FO, 5 May 1941 and UK Legation Tehran to FO, 5 May 1941. FO 371/27068.

⁴⁴⁸ FO to Baghdad Embassy, 15 April 1941. FO 371/27064.

⁴⁴⁹ UK Embassy Cairo to FO, 2 May 1941. FO 371/27067.

⁴⁵⁰ UK Embassy Baghdad to UK Embassy Jerusalem, 1 May 1941. FO 371/27067.

Vice-Marshal Harry George Smart ordered a pre-emptive strike against Iraqi positions outside the base, and Royal Navy warships were ordered to fire on Iraqi forces.⁴⁵¹

The Anglo-Iraqi War ended within the month on 31 May 1941 with the restoration of the Regent, after British forces rolled over the ill-disciplined, ill-trained and ill-equipped Iraqi Army that had only been ever used for internal security and not wars with an external power, let alone the Imperial military. Churchill was no Chamberlain; he was prepared to take ruthless action against the Iraqi fifth column and was not restrained by the niceties of peacetime. The Iraqi fifth column, whilst successful in seizing control of the Iraqi Government, was completely useless at their next primary concern, keeping control. They failed in this endeavour for two reasons. The first was that the British had learned from their mistakes in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland in regard to the dangers of fifth columns if they are allowed to go unchecked. Secondly, failure was the fault of the fifth column's German sponsors, the coup came in between a string of successes in North Africa and South-Eastern Europe and preparations for a war against the USSR. Geographically isolated from the *Wehrmacht* and low on the list of priorities, the Iraqi fifth column, despite all the promises of support was to be left at Britain's mercy by their purported German allies.



Cartoon depicting Rashid Ali rubbing his magic lamp to wish for German support for his coup, the note on the jackboot reads, 'Full Appearance Unavoidably Postponed, Nazi Geri'. 'Ali rubs his lamp', By David Low, *Evening Standard*, 26 May 1941. Source, British Cartoon Archive, https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=iraq?page=20 Accessed 29 October 2015.

⁴⁵¹ Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.94 and SNO Persian Gulf to *Emerald*, *Yarra*, *Cockchafer*, Persian Gulf Sloops, 2 May 1941. FO 371/27067.

German Assistance – Too Little, Too Late

On 6 May 1941 Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the UK Ambassador to Turkey, sent a telegram to Eden detailing a conversation a British source had with the German and Italian Military Attachés on 4 May in Ankara:

[Axis] officials were worried over the premature outbreak of trouble in Iraq. They realised that if they could not assist Iraq, they would lose prestige in the Arabic world, and also the possibility of obtaining the oilfields, also that only intervention by air could arrive in time, but this presented considerable technical difficulties.⁴⁵²

This report from Turkey reveals the weaknesses of the Iraqi fifth column. They relied entirely on German support to be successful and at the time of hostilities with Britain that support would be slow, limited and of low priority for the *Wehrmacht* which was consumed by preparations for war with the USSR.

Despite this Rashid Ali's Government made open overtures to Berlin with Shawkat informing Saracoğlu whilst in Istanbul on 8 May that Baghdad only contacted the Germans after the commencing of hostilities and that they only desired normalised relations with Germany.⁴⁵³ In short Shawkat and the fifth columnists wanted to give the appearance that Berlin was coming to Baghdad's rescue instead of plotting hand in glove against the British before the April coup. The British saw Shawkat for the go-between for the fifth columnists and the Germans that he was and saw his presence in Istanbul as a threat to British interests; Knatchbull-Hugessen lobbied Saracoğlu for Shawkat's expulsion and he soon left Istanbul for Jeddah.⁴⁵⁴ In Jeddah Shawkat admitted to Ibn Saud that Germany agreed to send money, weapons and troops to assist Rashid Ali along with officers to train the Iraqi Army, and that Grobba, who had now arrived in Baghdad, and been empowered by Hitler to facilitate German aid to Iraq.⁴⁵⁵

On 11 May it became apparent to the British that *Luftwaffe* aircraft were being despatched to Iraq to assist Rashid Ali. The British were worried that they would stiffen Iraqi resolve and alter the military balance in the country in Germany's favour.⁴⁵⁶ Between 10 May, when Grobba returned

⁴⁵² UK Embassy Ankara to FO, 6 May 1941. FO 371/27068.

⁴⁵³ UK Embassy Ankara to FO, 9 May 1941. FO 371/27068.

⁴⁵⁴ FO to UK Embassy Ankara, 11 May 1941. FO 371/27069.

⁴⁵⁵ UK Legation Jeddah to FO 14 May 1941. FO 371/27069 and UK Legation Jeddah to FO, 15 May 1941. FO 371/27070.

⁴⁵⁶ War Cabinet, Chief of Staff Committee, 'Air Attack on Electric Generating Station, Baghdad', Note by the Chief of Air Staff, 11 May 1941. FO 371/27069.

to Iraq, and 15 May a total of twenty-four *Luftwaffe* aircraft⁴⁵⁷ (two squadrons) arrived in Mosul led by Colonel Werner Junck.⁴⁵⁸ These warplanes fell far short of what Rashid Ali had asked of Berlin on 28 April where he had told the Germans that he required ten *Luftwaffe* squadrons (120 aircraft), fifty armoured cars, hundreds of machine guns, dozens of heavy guns, 3 million bullets and £3 million a month.⁴⁵⁹ The Germans also pressured the Vichy authorities to despatch weapons from Syria to Iraq, a decision that would lead to the Allied invasion of Vichy Syria and Lebanon following the Anglo-Iraqi War, along with pitiful amount of £20,000 of gold with another £80,000 that only made it as far as Athens before the Iraqis were defeated.⁴⁶⁰

Further German assurances of assistance came on 23 May when Hitler issued Directive 30 where he publicly declared his support for German assistance to Iraqi fifth columnists:

I have therefore decided to advance developments in the Middle East by giving support to Iraq. Whether and how the English position between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf shall in due course be finally destroyed, in connection with an offensive against the Suez Canal, will only be decided after Barbarossa.⁴⁶¹

Directive 30 symbolised the failures of German assistance to Iraq. They wanted to weaken the British in the Middle East and were prepared to send help, but their forces were tied up with preparations for the invasion of the USSR and until Moscow had fallen Baghdad was expected to fight the British alone. By 25 May the Germans were advising Rashid Ali to retreat from Baghdad to Mosul against the British advance and that due to supply shortages no further assistance would arrive for another two months.⁴⁶² Amir Faisal, Ibn Saud's son and Saudi Foreign Minister, reported to Hugh Stonehewer-Bird, UK Minister to Jeddah, that Saudi intelligence had learned that the Germans were incredibly angry with Iraqi military incompetence, poor intelligence, lack of fuel, inefficient pilots and mechanics and some said that Rashid Ali had deceived Berlin as to the state of his strength and preparedness for war with Britain.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ N.B. *Luftwaffe* assistance to Iraq was supposed to be led by Major Axel von Blomberg, son of former Commander-in-Chief of the German Armed Forces, Werner von Blomberg. Major Axel was killed on 15 May 1941 by Iraqi friendly fire as his Heinkel 111 bomber came in to land in Baghdad during a dogfight between RAF and RIAF aircraft. He was given a military funeral in Baghdad and was succeeded by Colonel Junck as *Fleigerführer Irak* (Flyer Commander Iraq).

⁴⁵⁸ Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, pp.105-106.

⁴⁵⁹ Hirsowicz, *Arab East*, p.146.

⁴⁶⁰ Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire*, p.132 and Hirsowicz, *Arab East*, p.165.

⁴⁶¹ Quoted in Eden, *The Reckoning*, p.243.

⁴⁶² UK Embassy Ankara to FO, 25 May 1941. FO 371/27072.

⁴⁶³ UK Legation Jeddah to FO, 29 May 1941. FO 371/27073.

Lacking effective German support the weak and poorly led, equipped and trained Iraqi Army collapsed in the face of the might of the British Empire. Rashid Ali, the Golden Square, the Grand Mufti, Fritz Grobba the Italian Minister and thirty other Germans and Arabs fled across the Iranian border on 30 May 1941 with the Regent and Nuri al-Said returning to power on 31 May.⁴⁶⁴ The fifth column had been defeated and the British would maintain firm control of Iraq for the duration of the Second World War.

Overview

To conclude we must answer two questions: How were the British successful at countering the fifth column? And secondly, why was the fifth column method a failure in Iraq?

The first question may be the easiest to answer: Britain at war did not face the same constraints as Britain at peace. If Britain had attempted to actively counter the Austrian and Czechoslovakian fifth columns they risked provoking a war with Germany. However by 1941 they were already at war with Germany and needn't concern themselves with Germany's reaction to their stifling of an ally. Churchill could afford to take the aggressive and ruthless decisions that Chamberlain couldn't, and, some would argue, or be prepared to take. However, there is a secondary answer to this question: Being in a state of war meant that Britain could keep its objectives in Iraq simple and contained, whereas in peacetime there were numerous other diplomatic, military, economic and financial matters to take into account, Iraq posed a threat and Britain would neutralise it. A WO telegram from 7 May 1941 spells out Britain's objectives in Iraq:

Object is to safeguard ourselves against Axis intervention in Iraq. The methods to attaining it are twofold: A. To defeat and discredit the leaders of the armed forces in the eyes of the Army and people in hope of Rashid's Government being replaced. B. To occupy key points to prevent Axis help, if sent, being effective.⁴⁶⁵

In short, war allowed Britain to be far more Machiavellian in regards to those who posed any threat to her greater strategic interests. Their experiences in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland had allowed them to identify Germany's preference for utilising fifth columns, and they had identified the political and military elite in Baghdad that would serve as her pawns. When war finally broke out between Britain and Iraq the British were able to move quickly and efficiently to subject the fifth column leaders to sustained propaganda attacks as their military was destroyed by Empire forces.

⁴⁶⁴ UK Embassy Baghdad to General Officer Commanding Iraq, Basra, 30 May 1941. FO 371/27073.

⁴⁶⁵ WO to Commander-in-Chief Middle East, 7 May 1941. FO 371/27068.

But why was the fifth column method unsuccessful in Iraq? They had followed the same formulae as the successful fifth columnists in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland: a political clique motivated by a pro-German ideology, in this case Arab nationalism, plans and executes a political coup to seize control of their host group and then invites assistance from their German sponsors to bring their host into the German fold.

Warner, Cole, Hirszowicz, Tarbush, Simon and Eden lay most of the blame at Germany's hesitation in providing assistance to Iraq but also recognise other factors. Simon argues that the Golden Square were "better politicians than soldiers" whose poor grasp of military affairs allowed the British to steamroll over the Iraqi Army with a vastly numerically inferior force. He is supported by Warner who places Iraqi military and political incompetence behind Germany's hesitation as reasoning for the fifth column's failure.⁴⁶⁶ Eden, Hirszowicz and Tarbush recognised that Germany's little and late assistance was due to having the bulk of the *Wehrmacht* engaged in preparations for Operation Barbarossa, and the bulk of the *Luftwaffe* entangled with the airborne invasion of Crete that began on 20 May 1941.⁴⁶⁷ Whilst Cole argues that the Germans were both too distant from Iraq to lend any effective help and were frankly uninterested in providing anything more than a token display of solidarity with the fifth columnists.⁴⁶⁸ Why waste resources on squabble in the Middle East when a struggle for the future of humanity with the Soviet Union lay only a few weeks away?

To conclude it was Germany's failure to lend effective and timely assistance, Iraqi political and military incompetence and mismanagement and Britain's quick, decisive and heavy-handed response to the crisis that accounted for the fifth column's failure in Iraq. Immediately after Britain had secured its control of Iraq it laid its eyes on Vichy Syria and fought a short but bloody war with the Vichy French forces in response for Vichy involvement in the shipment of arms to Rashid Ali's Government.⁴⁶⁹ Then Britain turned towards Iran where the Iraqi fifth columnists enjoyed the protection of a pro-German tyrant, Reza Shah Pahlavi, whom the British believed to be in bed with the Germans thanks to the activities of a sinister fifth column that purportedly grown under their very noses throughout Iran.

⁴⁶⁶ Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, p.157, and Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p.118.

⁴⁶⁷ Eden, *The Reckoning*, p.243, and Hirszowicz, p.171, and Tarbush, *Military in Politics*, pp.179-180.

⁴⁶⁸ Cole, 'Iraq in 1939', p.222.

⁴⁶⁹ N.B. The Syria-Lebanon Campaign was fought between Empire-led Allied forces and Vichy French forces from 8 June to 14 July 1941. The fighting was bloody and cost over 10,000 lives on both sides. For further reading on the Syria-Lebanon Campaign refer to C. Smith, *England's Last War Against France: Fighting Vichy 1940-1942* (London, 2010), Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, and Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*.

CHAPTER VI – IRAN “The Fifth Column Menace”

I consider that Stalin is right in regarding the Fifth Column menace in Iran as an urgent problem which calls for immediate vigorous action before the German advance towards the Caucasus renders effective pressure impossible.⁴⁷⁰

Sir Stafford Cripps, the British Ambassador to Moscow, reported back to London in the weeks following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 in Operation Barbarossa. In the aftermath of Barbarossa London and Moscow, the world's foremost capitalist and communist powers stood in alliance against a common enemy, Hitler's fascism. Churchill and Stalin, two men who personally despised each other, each man believing the other to be the devil incarnate, put aside ideological differences and sought to wipe Nazism from the face of the earth. However they first had to deal with the initial onslaught of nearly four million *Wehrmacht* and Axis soldiers, the largest invasion force in history, that looked set to overwhelm and defeat the Soviet Union using the refined *Blitzkrieg* tactics that had delivered the Germans easy victories in Poland, Western Europe and the Balkans. The Red Army was collapsing on all fronts, surrendering vast swathes of land and losing millions of men, but London and Moscow also saw a secondary threat to Soviet survival that had the potential to hamstring the Allied war effort not only in the USSR, but in the Middle East and India; that threat was Iran. Ruled by a tyrannical anti-British and anti-Soviet Shah who held strong pro-German sympathies, had invited thousands of Germans into his country and who afforded protection to the fifth column leaders who had fled Iraq, Britain and the Soviet Union could not tolerate this rogue state in their rear as they fought to hold off the advancing Germans. London and Moscow saw German fifth column pawns, provocateurs and parasites all over Iran, in its politics, civil service, military, finance and infrastructure fearing that they would facilitate a *Wehrmacht* advance over the Caucasus allowing the Germans to seize control of the oilfields of Baku, Iran, Iraq and the wider region.

This chapter will examine the fifth column in Iran in five sections: First the personal rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi, how he governed Iran, his unsteady relations with Britain and the Soviet Union and his newly forged relations with the Third Reich. Secondly, British and Soviet interests in Iran, including the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, treaties Tehran had with London and Moscow, and Iran's strategic geographical location. Third, the German community in Iran, specifically how powerful, influential and large it was, how it operated in Iran, if it could be considered a fifth column and

⁴⁷⁰ UK Embassy Moscow to FO, 9 July 1941. FO 371/27230.

British paranoia concerning it. Fourth, other motivations that Britain and the USSR had to taking a hard line against Iran including the wider war, oil, strategy and Allied supplies to the Soviet Union via the Persian Corridor. Finally the Anglo-Soviet Invasion of Iran on 25 August 1941, the defeat and occupation of Iran with the overthrow of Reza Shah, and the reality of the German fifth column in Iran.

Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi

Iran, or Persia as the nation was known before changing its name in 1935, was, as Churchill described, a “weak and ancient state”.⁴⁷¹ Long past its glory days of ancient past the Persia of the early twentieth century was corrupt, dysfunctional, poorly lead, strife with internal division and rivalries, politically stifled and victim to foreign intrigue as the British and Russian Empires waged their invisible war for control of a buffer zone between British India to the south and Russian Central Asia and the Caucasus to the north. The ruling dynasty was the Qajars who presided over a series of weak and ineffective governments in Tehran that would rise and fall as political factions competed with one another in the Persian Parliament. Reza Shah, or Reza Khan as he was known before seizing the throne, was a Colonel in the elite Cossack Brigade of the Persian Army who engineered a coup in May 1921 that saw him become the *de facto* political leader of Iran as War Minister.⁴⁷² Qajar Persia was an exhausted and ruined state and Reza Khan was seen as a modernising reformer who could transform the country into a strong, independent state which would stand up to British and Russian influence and intrigue.⁴⁷³ He secured his authority by supressing several tribal and region revolts, made himself Prime Minister in October 1923 and in December 1925 convinced Parliament to depose the Qajars and offer him the Imperial Crown as *Shahinshah*, the King of Kings.⁴⁷⁴ At his coronation on 25 April 1926 in an act of extreme vanity and symbolism he famously placed the Imperial Crown upon his own head in imitation of Napoleon Bonaparte’s coronation as Emperor of the French.⁴⁷⁵

Reza Shah’s new dynasty was founded upon what Abrahamian called the three pillars, whereby authority was centralised through administration, regulation and domination with the Army, bureaucracy and court patronage constituting each pillar.⁴⁷⁶ Reza Shah expanded the Army from 40,000 to 127,000 men and equipped them with modern weapons, he created a civil service of 90,000 administrators to replace the haphazard patchwork of tribal, religious, local and regional

⁴⁷¹ Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, p.428.

⁴⁷² E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, 1982), p.119.

⁴⁷³ M. Reza Ghods, ‘Iranian Nationalism and Reza Shah’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 27 (1991), pp.35-45, p.37.

⁴⁷⁴ Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, pp.119-120.

⁴⁷⁵ Reza Ghods, ‘Reza Shah’, p.43.

⁴⁷⁶ Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, p.136.

authorities that had flourished under the Qajars and handed out land, money, offices and titles to loyal supporters to keep his throne secure.⁴⁷⁷

Reza Shah's rule often led to loggerheads with Britain and the Soviet Union (the issue of Reza Shah and British and Soviet interests in Iran will be discussed in the next section), the traditional foreign influences in Persia, whom he sought to counter by fostering close relations with Hitler's Germany. Like many of the fifth columnists discussed in this discourse Reza Shah was attracted to the NSDAP's rule of Germany, in particular how it reversed Germany's economic fortunes, reasserted itself as a militarily powerful state and fostered a form of nationalism that many in the 1930s found to be extremely attractive. Regarding Hitler's harsh stance against Bolshevism, in this respect it is important to remember that Iranian-Soviet border was over 1,000 miles long, and his apparent desire to stand up to the British Empire made Iran an obvious friend of Germany. Reza Shah fostered trade with the Reich and by the beginning of 1939 over 41 percent of Iran's foreign trade was with Germany.⁴⁷⁸ Reza Shah also invited hundreds of German technicians, engineers and businessmen to assist in his economic modernisation programme, that the German Government, which desired to undermine British and Soviet influence in Iran and the wider Middle East, eagerly obliged to send.⁴⁷⁹ It was to be these Germans, their families and the merchants, bankers, doctors, officers and advisors sent out with them, who were to form the final fifth column to be studied in this essay. The British, and later Soviets, came to see the German fifth column as a threat to their influence in Iran and the wider war effort against Germany; what Moscow and London were most concerned with was that the fifth column enjoyed the protection of Reza Shah and the Iranian State.

British and Soviet Interests

The British and Russian Empires had a long history of political intrigue and influence in Persia, which continued into the twentieth century with the formation of the USSR. Both London and Moscow sought to keep Persia as a friendly buffer zone between their respective domains and would support rival political and tribal factions within the country.⁴⁸⁰ The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention sought to formalise British and Russian spheres of influence over Persia with Russia in the north and Britain in the south with Tehran as a neutral buffer between them.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, pp.136-137.

⁴⁷⁸ Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.24.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁴⁸⁰ N.B. Throughout the nineteenth century Anglo-Russian rivalries, intrigues and exploits in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet were known as the 'Great Game', a term introduced in popular consciousness by Rudyard Kipling in his 1901 novel *Kim*. The Great Game saw Britain and Russia vie for control of Central Asia and is generally accepted to have spanned from 1813 with the Russo-Persian Treaty to 1907 with the Anglo-Russian Convention.

⁴⁸¹ Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.14.

The 1907 Convention led to a lull in tensions between the two powers. However the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution reignited them with the Soviets declaring the 1907 Convention void and demanding an end of British influence in Persia.⁴⁸² To counter the threat of Communism in Iran the British sought to force the Qajars to sign a new Anglo-Persian Treaty in 1919 which would have effectively turned Persia into a British Protectorate and hand political, economic, financial and military powers to Britain.⁴⁸³ The treaty was rejected due to popular outrage in Iran and the Soviet occupation of the northern province of Gilan in April 1920.⁴⁸⁴ With Britain held temporarily at bay the Qajars signed the Soviet-Persian Treaty in February 1921 that saw Soviet withdrawal from Gilan.⁴⁸⁵ Under the terms of the Treaty the USSR cancelled Iran's debts to the former Tsarist regime and would respect Iran's territorial integrity and sovereignty in return for the right to station Soviet troops in Iran if the country were ever to be used as a jumping off point for a third party to attack Iran.⁴⁸⁶ Reza Khan was one of the architects of the Treaty, ironically sowing the seeds for his own downfall twenty years later.

British interest in Iran were primarily focused on Iran's oil industry via the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) which was part owned by the British Government. The first oil concession was granted in 1901 to William Knox D'Arcy's First Exploration Company whereby his company was given exclusive oil exploration, drilling, production and refining rights in southern Iran in exchange for 16 percent of annual profits in royalties to Tehran along with £20,000 cash and £20,000 in shares to the Shah.⁴⁸⁷ First Exploration was brought out by the British Government in 1909 and became AIOC which built the world's largest oil refinery at Abadan, Iraq on the Persian Gulf, making the AIOC a vital Imperial asset as in 1913 Royal Navy ships were converted from coal to oil.⁴⁸⁸ By 1939 the AIOC was the largest producer of Middle Eastern oil at 10 million tons a year.⁴⁸⁹ The Knox D'Arcy Concession became a bone of contention between Britain and Reza Shah, as each side tried to exploit it for their own ends at the expense of the other. In November 1932, in an attempt to exert his power and degrade foreign influence in his country, Reza Shah cancelled the Concession and demanded a fairer renegotiated agreement.⁴⁹⁰ Resorting to Imperialist gunboat diplomacy the British conducted a major naval exercise in the Persian Gulf and pressured Reza Shah into reinstating

⁴⁸² Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.17.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁴⁸⁴ Reza Ghods, 'Reza Shah', p.37 and Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.19.

⁴⁸⁵ Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.19.

⁴⁸⁶ 'Summary of Soviet Notes to Tehran', 24 August 1941. FO 371/27201, and Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, p.118.

⁴⁸⁷ M.G. Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah: Plunder of Iran*, (Gainesville, 2011), p.240.

⁴⁸⁸ Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, p.13.

⁴⁸⁹ Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p.6.

⁴⁹⁰ Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, p.144, Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.22-23, and Majd, *Plunder of Iran*, pp.255-257.

the Concession which he did in April 1933.⁴⁹¹ The 1933 Concession upped the AIOC's royalties to Tehran from 16 to 20 percent. However Iran was forced to concede more land, annul its right to tax the AIOC, extend the concession by 32 years and effectively hand Iran's oil industry to the AIOC.⁴⁹² Oil was the main British Imperial interest in Iran, and London was prepared to do anything to protect it during their war with Hitler's Germany.

German Fifth Column in Iran and British Paranoia

The German fifth column in Iran ostensibly existed to assist in the modernisation of Iran's economy and to strengthen German-Iranian economic ties.⁴⁹³ However the British believed that economic links went hand in hand with political influence, and saw the German community as a political/military instrument wielded by the NSDAP, as there were Germans in positions of power and influence throughout Iran's economic, transportation, finance and military agencies.⁴⁹⁴ Rashid Ali's coup in Iraq, which was supported by German agents from Iran, convinced the British that the German community was a fifth column, as it had been in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig, and the economic justification for their presence in Iran was a cover that the Iranian Government was parlay to.⁴⁹⁵ The British counted 117 Germans to have illegally crossed the Iraqi-Iranian border during the Iraqi Rebellion and believed that the German Legation in Tehran was the hub of fifth column activities in the Middle East.⁴⁹⁶ Reza Shah's protection of the exiled Iraqi rebels and Rashid Ali's contacts with the German Legation in Tehran seemingly confirmed to the British their suspicions about the German community, that they had sponsored the Iraqi Rebellion and had convinced the Iranian Government to shelter their fifth columnists.⁴⁹⁷ Britain became extremely paranoid about the fifth column's intentions in Iran, believing that they would convince Reza Shah to join the Axis, launch a coup and place a puppet on the throne, instigate tribal uprisings, conduct a campaign of terrorism and sabotage and facilitate a German invasion via the Caucasus.⁴⁹⁸ Sir Reader Bullard, the British Minister to Tehran, believed the fifth column in Iran would not repeat the mistakes of Rashid Ali and the Golden Square by playing their hand with the *Wehrmacht* so far away and would instead

⁴⁹¹ Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, p.144, and Majd, *Plunder of Iran*, p.256.

⁴⁹² Abrahamian, *Between Two Revolutions*, p.144, Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, pp.22-23, and Majd, *Plunder of Iran*, p.258.

⁴⁹³ Tehran Intelligence Summary 1, 11 January 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁴⁹⁴ UK Legation Tehran to FO, 30 April 1941. FO 371/27199.

⁴⁹⁵ FO to UK Embassy Baghdad, 3 June 1941. FO 371/27073.

⁴⁹⁶ Tehran Intelligence Summary 10, 17 May 1941, and Tehran Intelligence Summary 11, 31 May 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁴⁹⁷ UK Legation Tehran to FO, 21 June 1941. FO 371/27076.

⁴⁹⁸ Military Attaché Tehran to WO, 27 July 1941, and Military Attaché Tehran to WO, 28 July 1941. FO 371/27241.

wait for the USSR to collapse and *Wehrmacht* reinforcements arrive over the Caucasus, giving Britain time to move against the fifth column before it could strike.⁴⁹⁹

The British Government estimated the total size of the German community in Iran to be 3,000 individuals of whom 1,000 were military aged males of which a communiqué to the US Government declared:

More important than their number is the fact that most of these men occupy key positions throughout the country. They are highly organised and act as centres of propaganda. In the event of Germany being in a position to launch an attack their role would obviously be more active. No other foreign community has anything like the same position and influence.⁵⁰⁰

Moscow, determined to discredit the Germans in Iran after Barbarossa, declared that the German community numbered between 5,000 and 10,000, however the British privately doubted this.⁵⁰¹ British and Soviet paranoia was compounded by the presence of *Abwehr* agents in Iran, who in one instance arrived with briefcases filled with US Dollars, and *Wehrmacht* officers advising the Iranian military and reorganising it on the model of the *Wehrmacht*.⁵⁰² Working together London and Moscow pressured the Iranian Government to both restrict the influence of the German community and the expel individuals who were surplus to Iran's economic modernisation. Bullard and the Soviet Ambassador to Tehran, Andre Smirnoff, composed joint memoranda to Tehran,⁵⁰³ warning them of the danger posed by the fifth column and encouraging Iran to take measures against it, stating:

There can indeed be no doubt, in the view of what has happened in many countries, that these persons will be employed, whenever it may seem to the German Government that the appropriate time has arrived, to create disorder, either in Iran herself or in neighbouring countries, with a view to assist the execution of Germany's military plans.⁵⁰⁴

Tehran attempted to reassure London and Moscow that they were taking the threat of the fifth column seriously. An example of these reassurances can be found in a report from Cripps, who reported on a conversation with the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow:

⁴⁹⁹ UK Legation Tehran to FO, 9 August 1941. FO 371/27200.

⁵⁰⁰ FO to UK Embassy Washington DC, 20 August 1941. FO 371/27201.

⁵⁰¹ FO to UK Embassy Moscow, 10 July 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵⁰² FO to UK Embassy Moscow, 13 August 1941. FO 371/27231, and Tehran Intelligence Summary 24, 30 November 1940. FO 371/27188, and Tehran Intelligence Summary 7, 5 April 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁵⁰³ N.B. In total there were three joint Anglo-Soviet Memorandums to the Iranian Government, 26 June, 19 July and 16 August 1941.

⁵⁰⁴ Joint Anglo-Soviet Memorandum, 9 August 1941. FO 371/27200.

He assured me again and again that they would not allow the Germans to create any trouble, but I pointed out that quite a lot of other countries had said the same thing, but had afterwards found that fifth column activities had overwhelmed them. He replied that they were an Eastern race and they could and would cut off all German heads if there was trouble.⁵⁰⁵

Despite these public assurances Tehran took little to no action against the German community.⁵⁰⁶ Only 30 Germans had left Iran within three weeks of the second Anglo-Soviet Memorandum on 19 July 1941, which, if it were to continue at that rate, meant all 3,000 Germans would take two years to leave the country.⁵⁰⁷ The Iranians justified this slow rate of expulsion as a ploy not to instigate German anger and not to be appearing to be buckling to British and Soviet pressure.⁵⁰⁸ By 23 August 1941 British and Soviet patience with Iran's failure to take any action against the German fifth column snapped and a decision was made to invade the country on 25 August. In a memorandum to the US Government, to keep the Americans informed on Allied policy towards Iran, the British explained their justifications for taking military action. They claimed that the excessive number of Germans posed a threat to British and Soviet interests, that the Iranians had failed to take satisfactory measures against them, that via the fifth column and the German Legation Berlin was encouraging Tehran to "drag their heels", and that Reza Shah and his Government believed the *Wehrmacht* would be victorious against the Red Army:

In these circumstances His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Government find themselves obliged to have recourse to other measures to deal with the menace arising from the activities of enemy agents in Persia.⁵⁰⁹

The British were not going to make the same mistake as they had made in every other example cited in this discourse. In Iraq they had been fortunate that the fifth column had received no support from the *Wehrmacht* and had been countered quickly before it could do serious damage to British interests. Now in Iran they were going to nip the threat in the bud, regardless of the potential magnitude of the actual threat the 3,000 Germans posed.

⁵⁰⁵ UK Embassy Moscow to FO, 2 August 1941. FO 371/27231.

⁵⁰⁶ UK Military Attaché Tehran to WO, 13 August 1941. FO 371/27200.

⁵⁰⁷ UK Legation Tehran to FO, 17 August 1941. FO 371/27201.

⁵⁰⁸ UK Legation Tehran to FO, 17 August 1941, and UK Legation Tehran to FO, 20 August 1941. FO 371/27201.

⁵⁰⁹ FO to UK Embassy Washington DC, 23 August 1941. FO 371/27201.

Realpolitik – War, Oil, Strategy and the Persian Corridor

The case of the fifth column in Iran not only takes place within the paradigm of the Second World War but also within the context that Germany is not only at war with Britain, as was the case during the Iraq Rebellion, but is also at war with the Soviet Union. In August 1941 Germany looked to be on the cusp of victory against the USSR as the Red Army collapsed on all fronts in the face of the *blitzkrieg* onslaught and Britain knew that if the Soviet Union was defeated then Hitler would turn his full attention towards Britain and the Empire. Britain needed time to rearm, reorganise and recover from the defeats of 1940 and early 1941, therefore it was paramount to keep the USSR fighting Germany in the form of military and economic supplies and ensuring that no hostile elements could hamstring her from behind. In this regard Iran became not only an issue of eliminating the fifth column but also reflected the realities of the wider war which London and Moscow kept secret from their people, their allies and the Iranian Government.

There were two possible routes by which Britain could keep the Soviet Union supplied with materials and foodstuffs. Loading supplies onto ships and sending them round the Arctic to the northern Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangel was the first route. However this was fraught with dangers and difficulties as it meant the Arctic Convoys had to pass by German occupied Norway where they were subject to *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine* attack and the sub-zero conditions threatened the ships and crews of the convoys themselves.⁵¹⁰ The second route was for supplies from Iraq and India and the Far Eastern Empire to travel overland through Iran on road and rail links in what became known as the Persian Corridor.⁵¹¹ It was Moscow which first proposed the notion of supplying the southern front through Iran on 29 June, just one week after Barbarossa, and they requested British help in achieving this.⁵¹² Desperate for supplies and “unduly optimistic” Moscow outlined the first route from Nokkundi, in British India, to Meshed near the Iranian-Soviet border which they planned to develop to carry 2,000 tons a month on 100 5-ton lorries with a seven day turnaround.⁵¹³ The British calculated that if the Nokkundi-Meshed route was to be developed to 2,000 tons a month then 300 lorries would be required, which they believed should be British, not Soviet, controlled in case the USSR surrendered to Germany and the lorries, and supplies, fell into German hands.⁵¹⁴ To expand the Persian Corridor’s capacity several ports on the Persian Gulf, both

⁵¹⁰ N.B. For more on the Arctic Convoys refer to: J. Beaumont, *Comrades in Arms: Britain Aid to Russia 1941-1945* (Bristol, 1980), S.W. Roskill, *The Navy at War 1939-1945* (London, 1960), B.B. Schofield, *The Russian Convoys* (London, 1964) and R. Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945* (Barnsley, 2011).

⁵¹¹ N.B. Over the course of the Second World War the Soviet Union was supplied by the Western Allies via three principle routes: the Arctic Convoys, the Persian Corridor and the Pacific Convoys from the United States.

⁵¹² Sir Stafford Cripps to War Cabinet, 29 June 1941. FO 371/27225.

⁵¹³ UK Embassy Moscow to Ministry of Economic Warfare, 29 July 1941. FO 371/27225.

⁵¹⁴ Secretary of State for India to Indian Government, 31 July 1941. FO 371/27225.

Iranian and Iraqi, with serviceable rail links, were identified and formulated into British plans.⁵¹⁵ The issue of the Persian Corridor to supply the USSR was never admitted to in London's and Moscow's demarches to Tehran which only focused on the German community with a committee report hinting that the issue of the fifth column was being used as a smokescreen to hide their true intentions:

It is a pity that the activities of the Germans in Persia have been singled out as the only issue in regard to which we are at present prepared to apply the screw.⁵¹⁶

The defence of India and Turkey was also a contributing factor in British and Soviet minds for intervention in Iran. India was the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire and many in the British and Indian Governments saw it as essential to the Empire's survival; the potential of having a hostile Iran on its border threatened to bring the Axis powers right up to the Empire's heartland.⁵¹⁷ In mid-July Sir Archibald Wavell, the new Commander-in-Chief India, wrote of Iran:

The most important [step] is immediate action to eliminate the Germans from Iran and to arrange for cooperation with the Russians in that area to block the advance of the Germans towards India either from the Caucasus or Turkey. Failure to action against the Fifth Column will allow German penetration right up to the Indian border.⁵¹⁸

Wavell urged immediate action against Iran before the international situation deteriorated any further, not only in regards to Barbarossa but also the souring relations with Japan which looked set to enter the war within the coming months.⁵¹⁹ Wavell's reasoning for this was that India's defences were weak, with "practically non-existent" anti-aircraft or anti-tank defences, no modern aircraft and poor artillery. Therefore it was necessary to neutralise any potential threat Iran might pose to buy time to upgrade India's defences before Japan entered the war.⁵²⁰

In regards to Turkey, Britain, saw the neutralisation of a hostile Iran as essential to her defence and continued neutrality. Turkey bordered both Axis and Allied territories, but remained fiercely neutral with a powerful, modern military to defend her, and her painful experience of being

⁵¹⁵ Committee for the Coordination of Allied Supplies, 'Supplies to Russia via Iran', 30 July 1941. FO 371/27225.

⁵¹⁶ Committee for the Coordination of Allied Supplies, 'Supplies to Russia via Iran', 30 July 1941. FO 371/27225.

⁵¹⁷ J. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London, 2012), p.338.

⁵¹⁸ Commander-in-Chief India to WO, 19 July 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

on the losing side of the First World War to dampen any appetite for joining the Second.⁵²¹ If Iran were to join the Axis camp either by coup or by choice then Turkey would be bookended by Germany and her allies in both east and west.⁵²² Britain and the USSR both sent joint assurances to Turkey that their actions against Iran were designed to protect Turkish neutrality, and that they weren't trying to push Turkey into war with Germany or anyone else, and that neither power had designs on Turkish territory, in particular the strategic Bosphorus Straits, that were the object of Tsarist Russian designs in the First World War.⁵²³ London was so desperate to keep Turkey in the loop, that the Turks were informed of the contents of the final joint memorandum to Tehran, dated 16 August, two days before it was presented to the Iranian Government.⁵²⁴

Finally no discussion on the strategic importance of Iran would be complete without oil. As previously mentioned, the AIOC was Britain's main Imperial asset in Iran and the Abadan Refinery was essential to the Imperial war effort. The AIOC's twenty percent royalty to the Iranian Government constituted Reza Shah's primary source of revenue. His modernisation programme, which included excessive military and industrial spending, had increased Iran's financial deficit tenfold between 1940 and 1941.⁵²⁵ In a bid to increase his revenue Reza Shah began demanding further concessions from the AIOC, including a £1.5 million additional flat rate to be added to the royalty.⁵²⁶ Not only did this infuriate the British but it also unnerved them regarding Reza Shah's intentions towards the AIOC with Eden even suspecting that Reza Shah may attack, destroy, or, even worse in British eyes, nationalise the Iranian oilfields as leverage against Britain.⁵²⁷ There was also the rationale of protecting the AIOC from the Germans, both the fifth column and the *Wehrmacht*, who looked poised to defeat the Red Army and enter Iran via the Caucasus. It was well known and understood that Germany lacked major oil supplies and that she needed to capture British and Soviet-controlled oilfields in the Caucasus and Middle East.⁵²⁸ By taking military action in Iran, Britain

⁵²¹ S. Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An 'Active' Neutrality* (Cambridge, 2004), p.38

⁵²² FO to UK Embassy Moscow, 18 August 1941. FO 371/27231.

⁵²³ War Cabinet, Defence Committee, 'Operations in Persia', 8 August 1941. FO 371/27231.

⁵²⁴ FO to UK Embassy Ankara, 11 August 1941. FO 371/27231.

⁵²⁵ Tehran Intelligence Summary 6, 22 March 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵²⁶ Tehran Intelligence Summary 25, 14 December 1940. FO 371/27188.

⁵²⁷ 'Eden to Churchill 22 July 1941', in Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, pp.424-425.

⁵²⁸ N.B. Germany's chief source of oil came from the oilfields of Romania. However these fields were vulnerable to RAF and Soviet attack and they had a low production output. To remedy this German scientists developed a form of synthetic oil by converting coal. Whilst this was effective in negating the worst effects of poor oil supplies Germany needed to secure highly productive oil supplies either in the Caucasus, that were controlled by the Soviet Union, or in the Middle East, that were controlled by the British Empire.

could not only secure and guarantee the defence of the AIOC oilfields, but also be in a position to either destroy or occupy the Soviet oilfields in the Caucasus in the event of a Soviet defeat.⁵²⁹

It would be these secret issues – the Persian Corridor, the wider war and strategy, and oil – that Britain and the Soviet Union came to their decision to jointly invade Iran on 25 August 1941. The 3,000 strong German fifth column would serve as the public justification for their actions, regardless of whether it actually posed a threat or even was a genuine fifth column.

Invasion and the Damp Squib

On 25 August 1941 Great Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran, the British and Empire forces from the south west over the Iraqi border, and the Red Army from the north over the Caucasus. Both London and Moscow knew that the Iranian military would not be able to withstand their overwhelming combined might, confident that the Iranians would only offer token resistance.⁵³⁰ The Iranian Army boasted just over 126,000 men but they lacked training, discipline and heavy artillery equipment, despite Reza Shah's spending sprees.⁵³¹ British military planning made securing the oilfields a top priority, further evidence that the removal of the German fifth column was a convenient excuse for military action rather than the primary objective, and stressed the need to be seen working in conjunction with the Soviets.⁵³²

To convince the Iranian people Britain and the USSR dropped propaganda leaflets across Iran justifying themselves. They claimed to be ridding the people of a corrupt and tyrannical Shah, who had abused his power to amass private wealth at the expense of his subjects, driven the Iranian economy into the ground, made an unholy alliance with Nazi Germany which cared nothing for Iran and only sought to exploit its people and resources.⁵³³ Their propaganda leaflets also ended with a very stark warning to any who thought of resisting the joint Allied invasion:

But if any oppose us or help the Germans [they] will be destroyed.⁵³⁴

The Iranian Army collapsed faster and harder than expected in the face of the Imperial and Red Armies. No fortifications had been erected, soldiers hadn't been trained how to use their new

⁵²⁹ 'Churchill to General Ismay, Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, 5 November 1941', in Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, p.466 and UK Embassy Moscow to FO 9 July 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵³⁰ Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, 'Operations in Iran, Report', 18 July 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵³¹ WO to UK Military Mission in Moscow, 21 August 1941. FO 371/27232.

⁵³² WO and Chiefs-of-Staff to Commanders-in-Chief India, Mediterranean, Middle East and East Indies, Undated but implied to be late July 1941. FO 371/27230.

⁵³³ WO to Commanders-in-Chief India and Middle East and UK Legation Tehran, 20 August 1941, and WO to UK Military Mission with the Red Army, 21 August 1941. FO 371/27232.

⁵³⁴ WO to UK Military Mission with the Red Army, 21 August 1941. FO 371/27232.

weapons, no supply arrangements had been made, the footsoldiers were both underfed and underpaid, no anti-aircraft defences were in place and the senior officers were on the whole corrupt and useless in the face of disciplined and determined Soviet and Empire troops, all resulting in mass desertions.⁵³⁵ By 28 August Reza Shah had ordered a ceasefire and armistice terms were offered to him. The first demand was for all German and Italian nationals to be handed over to the Allied powers, giving the veneer that the main objective of the invasion was to remove the German fifth column.⁵³⁶ Then Britain and the USSR demanded the right to station troops anywhere in Iran, to secure its oilfields and communications routes that they had the right to improve, and for Iran to terminate all diplomatic, commercial and civil relations with Germany and Italy.⁵³⁷ Reza Shah was slow in implementing the demands and delayed in handing over the 3,000 Germans to the British and Soviets. In response their armies jointly marched on Tehran, Reza Shah abdicated on 16 September, and Empire and Soviet troops occupied the capital the following day.⁵³⁸ Reza Shah's son, Mohammed Reza Shah, assumed the Iranian throne and agreed to the armistice terms. In an intelligence report, written after the invasion and occupation, Mohammed Reza Shah is described in the following terms, hinting that the issue of the German fifth column was not Britain's only issue when the decision to invade was made and instead sought to remove an uncooperative leader and install a more cooperative, almost puppet, in his place:

Estimates of the young Shah's character vary considerably. He apparently maintained close relations with the German Legation, but this may have been politic. He is not credited with much strength of character, which if true suit present circumstances. It would be unwise to assume that he will inevitably be a bad sovereign. In any case, no alternative presented itself, nor could any have been without considerable delay and a welter of intrigue. The present Shah, if unsuitable, can be got rid of later. In the meantime it should be possible to prevent him from doing much harm.⁵³⁹

As stated numerous times throughout this chapter, Britain and the Soviet Union both used the issue of the German fifth column to justify their invasion of Iran. The German Minister to Tehran left Iran for Germany on 17 September, along with his family and dozens of German women and children

⁵³⁵ Tehran Intelligence Summaries 18, 19 and 20 for the period of 24 August to 24 September 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁵³⁶ WO to Commander-in-Chief India, 29 August 1941. FO 371/27233.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Tehran Intelligence Summaries 18, 19 and 20 for the period of 24 August to 24 September 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

whose husbands and fathers had been detained by the occupation forces.⁵⁴⁰ According to both nations, the German Legation in Tehran had been the beating heart of the fifth column, and the Minister's fleeing was interpreted by some contemporaries as evidence that the fifth column was indeed coordinated from the Legation. However this is a false equivalency and his flight to Germany was a matter of diplomatic protocol.⁵⁴¹ In the days and weeks following the invasion most of the remaining Germans in Iran had been detained, those who were luckily enough to be arrested by the British were deported to India; those unlucky enough to fall into Soviet hands faced the gulags of Siberia and potential death. It was during this period that the British admitted to themselves the truth about the German fifth column, that it simply did not exist anywhere near the scale that they had spoken of both publicly and privately:

German fifth column activities do not seem to have been so well organised as they might have been. Numerous opportunities for sabotage must have occurred in the confusion of the first few days after the invasion, but no advantage was taken of them. The motive inspiring the Germany colony in Tabriz was certainly to escape from the Russians with maximum speed.⁵⁴²

The German fifth column had been a damp squib, a charade, a convenient excuse for aggressive military action against a neutral sovereign state. A way for Britain to justify occupying the oilfields and installing military fortification around the refinery at Abadan, for military supplies to reach the Soviet Union to keep the Soviets fighting the Nazis, so an irksome leader who had continually annoyed, infuriated and agitated the British could be removed and a more pliable one installed in his place, so Britain and Russia could maintain their century old spheres of influence in Iran.

Overview

Iran in 1941 was not pre-war Austria, Czechoslovakia or Danzig, nor was it pre-Barbarossa Iraq of earlier that year. Iran in 1941 was a pawn in the game between the clash of titans that began on 22 June with Operation Barbarossa. Iran in 1941 was claimed to be gilded with Axis gold and a hotbed of German subversive activity in the Middle East that had sponsored a rebellion in Iraq and threatened to destroy the Soviet Union and British Empire through devious and underhand means. This was not true. Iran in 1941 was the anvil and Britain was now the hammer. For years German

⁵⁴⁰ Tehran Intelligence Summaries 18, 19 and 20 for the period of 24 August to 24 September 1941. FO 371/27188.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

fifth column movements had undermined and outwitted the British Government time and time again, playing into Hitler's hands and granting him more power and success. Britain had learned to fear and distrust any group of Germans living outside Germany (and especially those within it) and paranoia and xenophobia took over many minds in London when it came to the 3,000 Germans in Iran given past experience. There may have been a few *Abwehr* officers within the community, along with NSDAP officials and military advisors, but that does not mean the entire population was part of a fifth column plot to deliver Iran into the German fold, as had happened numerous times before. Rather the German community was a means to an end, not for Berlin, but for London and Moscow.⁵⁴³



Cartoon depicting British and Soviet soldiers 'cleaning up' Iran (labelled as Persia) of German fifth columnists, drawn as flies and labelled as 'Nazi tourists', a caricature of Reza Shah sits in the foreground like a sulking child. 'A good clean up', By Sidney 'George' Strube, *The Daily Express*, 28 August 1941.

Source, A Cartoon History of the Middle East,

<http://mideastcartoonhistory.com/1941To52/1941to52B.html> Accessed 29 October 2015.

⁵⁴³ For further reading on the Anglo-Soviet invasion and occupation of Iran refer to, E.C. Hodgkin, (ed.), Bullard, R., *Letters from Tehran: A British Ambassador in World War II Persia* (London, 1991), J. Beaumont, 'Great Britain and the Rights of Neutral Countries: The Case of Iran, 1941', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (1981), pp.213-228, and F. Eshraghi, 'Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 20 (1984), pp.27-52.

CONCLUSION

“A State of Coma”

Hitler needs to reassure his foreign enemies into such a state of coma that they will allow themselves to be engaged one by one.⁵⁴⁴

This prescient warning came from Sir Horace Rumbold the UK Ambassador to Berlin in late April 1933 three months after Hitler gained power in Germany as Chancellor. What can be discerned from Rumbold's warnings to the British Government is that it was known to London that Berlin wanted to commit to an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy however it currently lacked the military means to enact it. In 1933 Germany was still militarily weak and encircled by powerful enemies including France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and it did not want to provoke the ire of Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Therefore Germany would have to resort to more devious and intelligent methods to pursue its foreign policy to bring all Germans into a single Reich and then to create a German Empire at the expense of her neighbours and enemies. One of the most effective weapons Hitler had at his disposal was the German fifth column movements and organisations that were spread throughout Europe and, later on, in the Middle East. These fifth columns would be used to undermine and ultimately overthrow Germany's foreign enemies, making way for the *Wehrmacht* to march across their borders with little or no resistance offered, whilst Germany diplomacy, statecraft, propaganda and outright lies would be utilised to reassure more powerful countries, like Britain, that Germany's European designs were wholly concentrated on correcting the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles. An argument that Germany pursued until March 1939 when it absorbed the non-German Czech population of Bohemia and Moravia into the Third Reich.

Germany's first use of one of its fifth column movements in Austria, during 1934, was without doubt a disaster. The Austrian Nazis terrorist tactics were easily foiled by a united Austrian Government, despite their assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss, and the putsch was quickly quashed. All the Nazis had achieved in 1934 was alienating themselves from the Austrian populace, see many of their Austrian members either arrested, exiled or executed, making an enemy out of Mussolini's Italy and creating the perfect environment for Britain, France and Italy to join in unison against Germany in the guise of the Stresa Front. If it were not for Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935 which not only created fractures and divisions within the Austrian Government but also in the Stresa Front, it is open to speculation whether or not Nazi Germany would have attempted to pursue its foreign policy as aggressively as it did. It is rather down to Italian imperialism

⁵⁴⁴ UK Embassy Berlin to FO, 26 April 1933 in A. Eden, 'German Danger'.

and dreams (or delusions) of grandeur than German greatness that both the Stresa Front and Austrian Government fractured when they did, creating a fresh breeding ground for a second fifth column to gestate within Austria that ultimately succeeded in March 1938, through the use of political manipulation rather than violence and terrorism.

The Austrian fifth column had proved to Berlin that by playing a cleverer game, and participating within the existing political system of their host countries, the Nazis would be far more effective in achieving their ambitions. In the Sudetenland, Slovakia and the Free City of Danzig, these would be used with, what was to many, including the British Government, shocking success.

In the Sudetenland, the Nazis used a front organisation, the SdP, in a similar fashion to how a criminal organisation would use legitimate businesses to mask their illegal activities. By ratcheting up diplomatic pressure on the Czechoslovak Government in Prague, Berlin was able to provide the SdP a free hand within the Sudetenland, allowing them to unite the Sudeten German parties under their banner which allowed them to exert huge influence within the Czechoslovak State. Berlin kept Britain at bay by painting the situation of the Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia as a legitimate grievance from Versailles that required revision. Britain, in turn, was unwilling to risk war with Germany over the Sudetenland, as their rearmament programme lagged sorely behind Germany's, and opted to find a face-saving solution that would buy them time to rearm at the expense of Czechoslovakia. In September 1938, at the Munich Conference, Britain and France willingly surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany, without even consulting the Czechoslovak Government, as the SdP and their Nazi sponsors had gained the momentum that both London and Prague were unable to contain or withstand.

Six months later in Slovakia, the German sponsored Slovak nationalist HSLs engineered a second political crisis within Czechoslovakia that brought an end to the Czechoslovak State, saw Slovakia become an independent nation under German 'protection' and the Czech majority provinces of Bohemia and Moravia be annexed by the *Wehrmacht* without a shot being fired. By using non-German provocateurs in the form of the HSLs, Germany was able to publicly distance itself somewhat from the crisis, lulling Britain into a false perspective of the reality of the situation. This meant that by the time Britain understood the implications of the Slovak crisis, Germany had already occupied Bohemia and Moravia and placed Slovakia under their protection. Britain was now determined not be caught short by German duplicity and deception again, as the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia had violated Germany's promise at Munich that the Sudetenland was their last territorial demand in Europe. In the wake of the demise of Czechoslovakia Britain signed a guarantee with Poland that meant if Germany threatened Polish sovereignty or integrity then there would be war between them.

To many it was obvious that Poland would become the next target of German aggression; by 1939 the *Wehrmacht* was far larger and better equipped than it was when the Nazis seized power in 1933 leaving the Polish army both numerically and technologically inferior. What many did not realise was that Warsaw would not become the focus of Germany's attentions but rather the Free City of Danzig, which operated under the auspices of the League of Nations. The Nazi Party in Danzig had operated freely and effectively in the Free City as part of the democratic process and took power in their own right via open elections in the aftermath of the NSDAP's victory in Germany. The Danzig Nazis were able to avoid British suspicion and interference by keeping the façade of democracy and the League of Nations in place in Danzig, whilst amassing dictatorial powers behind the scenes that they only utilised when Germany was in a position of strength to deter any British attempts at diplomatic, economic or military intervention in the Free City. In a similar fashion to the Austrian Nazis, the Sudeten German Party and the Slovak Nationalists, the Danzig Nazis were able to engineer a political crisis with Poland that Germany used as justification for occupying Danzig and invading Poland. However what Germany did not expect was for Britain to stand by its guarantee to Poland and, with France, declare war on Germany, beginning the Second World War.

1938 to 1939 were the heydays of German fifth column successes, which had been utilised in conjunction with German diplomatic spin and threats of German military violence to expand the Nazi Empire into four sovereign states within mere months of each other. In that time Britain had been eased into a state of coma not only by German statecraft but also by its own eagerness to avoid war with Germany at almost any cost. However, unlike the case of Czechoslovakia, Britain meant to stand by its guarantee to Poland and after Churchill succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister in May 1940, continued and escalated the war against Germany and her Axis allies. If Chamberlain was Britain being eased into the coma then Churchill was Britain's awakening. No longer facing the same political, diplomatic, economic, or even moral and legal, constraints as Chamberlain, Churchill was able to take an aggressive and overwhelmingly violent approach to the German fifth column problem. This was the case with both Iraq and Iran in 1941 which faced the full, blunt force of the British Empire in the midst of the Second World War.

The Iraq Rebellion and ensuing Anglo-Iraqi War was spurred on by non-German fifth columnists in the form of anti-British Iraqi nationalists spearheaded by religious zealots, the Iraqi military elite and their political stooges. With promises of German military support the Iraqi nationalists launched their rebellion against the pro-British government in Baghdad and established a pro-German regime. However Churchill's Britain was not prepared to allow these men to threaten Britain's strategic position in the Middle East that was already threatened by German successes in North Africa and Greece, leading to a swift and decisive response. German promises of meaningful

military support for their Iraqi pawns failed to materialise and Iraq's geographical isolation from the *Wehrmacht* meant that support would not be swift in coming, resulting in the rebellion's defeat and the reassertion of British dominance over Iraq. The Iraqi Rebellion had seemingly confirmed British suspicions that German fifth columns were not just confined to Europe, either in the form of German populations or historical German influences and modern political sympathies, and that they existed outside Europe in territories that the British saw as either part of their dominion or within their sphere of influence. The British had become paranoid about the prospect of other German fifth columns wreaking havoc behind the front lines and they were prepared to let their paranoia guide their hearts and minds in the wake of Operation Barbarossa.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union can be marked as one of the two points that the Second World War truly became a world war, the second being the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. Barbarossa saw Britain employ the policy of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' despite Britain and the Soviet Union's hatred of one another, and the two powers saw it as necessary to join forces to destroy Nazism before it overwhelmed them both. Reza Shah's Iran was a thorn in their collective side, having played off British and Soviet interests against each other before drawing closer to Hitler's Germany. London and Moscow were determined to remove any potential threat his regime might pose to them, and achieve other secret strategic war aims. Guided by their paranoia of German fifth columns, given past experience, and allowing it to conveniently cloud their vision as to the realities of the situation in Iran the 3,000 strong German community in Iran were to provide London with the perfect scapegoat. Britain and the USSR jointly invaded Iran, forced Reza Shah to abdicate, placed his weak-willed son on the throne and occupied Iran's strategic communications systems and oilfields. The German fifth column transpired to be nothing more than a shadow of the fifth columns that Germany had employed with dazzling success in pre-war Europe. Rather the potential for a fifth column served as the legitimising excuse for Britain's "naked aggression" against Iran rather than the practical reason for it.⁵⁴⁵

The German fifth column movements of 1934 to 1941 were varying in terms of their structure, leadership, methods and degrees of success. However they all existed as pawns, provocateurs and parasites within their hosts at the direction of their sponsors in Berlin and all sought to undermine their hosts to the advantage of their sponsor. They were used so successfully that only direct military intervention by the British in Iraq and Iran were capable of preventing them from committing their German master's orders. In short Britain had to resort to disproportionate and extreme violence to counter them. This resort to violence shows how little Britain understood about these fifth columns, about how they operated, how they were formed and directed, and

⁵⁴⁵ J. Harvey (ed.) *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1941-1945* (London, 1978), p.36.

perhaps most importantly why people became fifth columnists in the first place. All Britain understood of these organisations was that they were a direct and deadly threat to their interests and that they must be countered regardless of the reality of the threat; like using a sledgehammer to squash an ant, effective but without understanding, proportionality or second thought to what gets squashed alongside it.

Britain's attitude towards German fifth column movements by 1941 can best be described by Sir Neville Bland, who was quoted at the beginning of this discourse:

Every German or Austrian servant, however superficially charming and devoted, is a real and grave menace, and we cannot conclude from our experiences in the last war that 'the enemy in our midst' is no more dangerous than it was then. I have not the least doubt that, when the signal is given, as it will scarcely fail to be when Hitler so decides, there will be satellites of the monster *all over the country* who will at once embark on widespread sabotage attacks on civilians and the military indiscriminately.⁵⁴⁶

The German fifth columns may have been pawns, provocateurs and parasites but the British understanding of them was guided by lies, paranoia, xenophobia, imperialist arrogance and cold political realism that allowed them to be used so successfully in Europe and so disastrously in the Middle East.

⁵⁴⁶ Sir Neville Bland to Anthony Eden, 'Fifth Column Menace', 14 May 1940. FO 371/25189.

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