

America, An Aloof Friend
The Limits of U.S.-Czechoslovak Relations from Munich to War

By Connor Schonta

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Introduction

“There are times when Europe can seem alarmingly big, and two people alarmingly small.”¹

It was fall 1938. George F. Kennan, a diplomat at the American legation in Prague, was moving into a new apartment with his wife, Annelise. Europe was at a crossroads, mostly because Adolf Hitler, chancellor of Germany, was snatching up territories he felt belonged to the Reich. He had already gotten Austria, and he now wanted parts of Czechoslovakia. Consequently, Prague, Czechoslovakia’s capital city, became the center of the world’s attention, as chaos and war threatened to swallow central Europe whole. The United States, though having a diplomatic presence in Czechoslovakia, made sure to stay out of Europe’s newest crisis. The administration of President Franklin Roosevelt was intent on remaining neutral to a European imbroglio. Thus, Kennan and his wife, along with all the other Americans working in Prague, could only watch the events transpire, contemplating their relative smallness in light of Europe’s big—immense—problems. Such feelings—that is, one’s smallness in the face of Europe’s sheer complexity—would continue to figure prominently into America’s relationship with Czechoslovakia over the next eleven months, and altogether, they aptly represent the peculiarities of U.S.-Czechoslovak diplomacy in the year leading up to World War II.

It was from the Schonborn palace and its 127 rooms that America’s diplomats to Czechoslovakia carried out their daily work. Located in Prague’s historic Mala Strana district, the palace is situated just a few hundred meters west of the capital’s great waterway, the Vltava River. The Schonborn’s initial buildings were constructed in the wake of the Thirty Years’ War,

¹ George F. Kennan, Unpublished Memoirs, “Part II: Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 1939, George Kennan Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, 14.

and by the twentieth century it held great historical value to the public.² With vast rooms, extensive gardens, and ornate architecture, it procured fond memories, and not the least bit of awe, from its American inhabitants. And despite the tumultuous events of 1938 and 1939, the palace's terraced garden always offered "silence and serenity" to those who needed it. From the Schonborn, one could catch sight of both the Hrad and the Charles Bridge, worthy reminders of Prague's enduring democracy and international flare. When the crises of September 1938 had reached a frightening pitch, and after wives and children had been sent out of the country, the American legation staff hunkered down in the palace together, outfitting a few of its rooms to something akin to school dormitories.³ In the months following Munich, it was primarily from the Schonborn that America's diplomats observed Czechoslovakia's neighbors, most of all Hitler's Germany, squeeze the life from the embattled state, and with it, the special bond that had long personified U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.

From 1918 to 1938, the United States and Czechoslovakia shared unique, friendly diplomatic relations, or what some even called "special" relations.⁴ Circumstances changed drastically in 1938 as a result of the Munich Agreement and its aftermath, and more broadly speaking as a result of Hitler's foreign policy. While grounded in shared history and common values, the U.S.-Czechoslovak connection that existed prior to World War II was often implicit

² Richard Crane, the first American diplomat to Czechoslovakia, purchased the palace in 1919 and sold it to the U.S. government in 1925. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, 124.60F1/348; The Schonborn had even been classified as a national monument. In a 1930 report on the palace, the American inspectors made sure to point out that the Schonborn was much more beautiful than the British, French, and Italian legation buildings. NARA, RG 59, 124.60F/283.5.

³ Kennan, "Memoirs Part II," 7. The Hrad, or Prague Castle, is the presidential castle in Prague. The Charles Bridge is a major pedestrian thoroughfare and tourist epicenter.

⁴ This sentiment was expressed in a number of capacities, both official and unofficial, but a good example is a message sent by Wilbur Carr, American minister to Czechoslovakia, just a few days before he closed the U.S. embassy in March 1939. Wanting the United States to provide relief to Czech refugees, Carr cited the "special situation" that existed between the two countries, noting Washington and Prague's long history of reciprocal friendliness, and how the United States even served as the model to which Czechoslovakia always looked. Carr to Hull, March 19, 1939, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1939, General, Vol. I, 50.

and exaggerated. During the twenty years of Czechoslovakia's First Republic, though, it hardly mattered whether the bond was perceived or tangible, as circumstances in the world held to a state which, for all its hardships, allowed Washington and Prague to maintain normal relations without having to question the *actual* value of their friendly relationship. It was not until fall 1938 that the efficacy of the two countries' relations were put to the test, and they did not fare well.

Where did the special bond come from? Much of it came as a result of Czechoslovakia's independence movement, and the role played by the United States therein. The notion that the United States, and specifically President Woodrow Wilson, fought hard on behalf of Czechoslovakia to secure the former's independence is not true, or it is at last too simple of an explanation. Wilson's commitment to liberalism and 'self-determination,' which in itself is an endlessly complex idea, did not necessarily extend to granting recognition to central Europe's various ethnic groups, and he preferred that Austria-Hungary outlive the war. It was only when this possibility lost all tenability that Czechoslovakia and the successor states, essentially through *fait accompli*, earned Wilson's blessing.⁵ That being said, America's eventual support of an independent Czechoslovakia, which became formalized in November 1918, was crucial to the Czechoslovak cause. As one of the tantamount figures of the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson, and by extension the United States, was a necessary factor in legitimizing Czechoslovakia's right to exist and guaranteeing her borders.⁶

⁵ For a thorough unpacking of Wilson's ideas of self-determination and his role in creating the postwar order, see Trygve Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 445-481.

⁶ For an appraisal of Czechoslovakia's drive toward independence, including American involvement, see Vera Olivova, *The Doomed Democracy: Czechoslovakia in a Disrupted Europe, 1914-1938* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 52-100.

As would become a trend in U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, it was the efforts and eagerness displayed by Czechoslovaks toward Americans that proved most important in establishing the special bond. As mentioned, Wilson and most other leaders did not seriously consider the national aspirations of Czechs and Slovaks until the end of the war when other options had failed.⁷ On the other hand, Czech leaders, zealous for Habsburg dissolution and autonomy for their people, actively campaigned for independence. The most central figure in the Czechoslovak struggle for independence, and by extension the most important person to the development of a U.S.-Czechoslovak bond, was Tomas Masaryk. Long an admirer of American democracy, Masaryk's ties to the United States turned personal when he married an American, Charlotte Garrigue, in 1878. They moved to Prague, where Masaryk had taken a university professorship, and while there Masaryk became an important voice in Czech politics. The couple made frequent trips to the United States, allowing Masaryk to mingle with influential American circles and float ideas of Czech autonomy.⁸

Toward the end of the war, Masaryk, who at that point was still drumming up support for an independent state for Czechs and Slovaks, moved to the United States and established a base of operations in Washington D.C. where he gained Wilson's ear.⁹ In May 1918 in Pittsburgh, delegations of expatriate Czechs and Slovaks drafted the Pittsburgh Agreement, which declared the intent of the two groups to establish a unified Czechoslovakia. Five months later, on October 17, Masaryk provided the State Department with a draft of the Czechoslovak declaration of independence. The following day, Czechoslovakia published its declaration of independence

⁷ Victor Mamatey, "The Establishment of the Republic," in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948*, eds. Victor Mamatey & Radomir Luza (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 20-22.

⁸ Paul Selver, *Masaryk: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 285-293.

⁹ For a thorough account of Masaryk's efforts in America, see Josef Kalvoda, "Masaryk in America in 1918," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 27, no. 1 (1979): 85-99.

from Paris, and just a short time later, Prague's National Committee issued its first law declaring that the Czechoslovak state "has come into being."¹⁰

Efforts, however tempered or calculated, came from the American side, too. In early October, Secretary of State Robert Lansing publically stated U.S. support of Czech and Slovak independence.¹¹ Later, in the midst of the Czechs preparing their declaration, Wilson indicated that he no longer intended to 'save' the Habsburg monarchy and gave mention to Czechoslovak autonomy. Wilson's message was far from clear, but it roused the Czechs, and their declared independence came a few weeks later.¹²

The simple fact that Masaryk carried out the penultimate efforts of his independence campaign in America was more important to the emerging 'special bond' than the campaign's actual effectiveness.¹³ Most historians attribute the rapid development of Czechoslovak independence first and foremost to the widely publicized successes of the Czech Legion, which achieved fantastic victories against the Bolsheviks in summer 1918. U.S. officials, resolutely hostile to the Bolshevik government, paid far more attention to the Legion's campaign than to Masaryk's propaganda or his talks with Lansing and Wilson.¹⁴ The Legion's victories, coupled

¹⁰ Mamatey, "The Establishment of the Republic," 26.

¹¹ For Lansing's role in Czechoslovakia's independence movement, as well as an appraisal of the balance between his and Wilson's contributions, see George Barany, "Wilsonian Central Europe: Lansing's Contribution," *The Historian* 28, no. 2 (1966): 224-251.

¹² Olivova, *The Doomed Democracy*, 88-89. The Czechs working from Paris, as well as the legionnaires serving in Russia, were especially excited about Wilson's note, seeing it as a logical precursor to official independence and the impending return to Prague. Carl Ackerman, "Czechs in Russia Acclaim Wilson's Reply to Austria," *New York Times*, October 25, 1918, 1.

¹³ Beyond the Pittsburgh Agreement and Masaryk's base of operations in Washington D.C., Masaryk and other leaders representing central European nations met in Philadelphia from October 23-26 to discuss common interests. Olivova writes that "[p]residing over the congress in the historic Independence Hall, Masaryk sat in the same chair in which, in 1776, George Hancock and Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson signed the declaration announcing the birth of the new American state." Olivova, *The Doomed Democracy*, 89. American papers at the time did not hesitate in noting the symbolic significance of the conference: "As the new bell pealed forth its chimes of liberty for the Slav nations Professor Masaryk...read the declaration from the steps of America's birthplace of freedom." "Independence Hall Sees Nations Born," *New York Times*, October 27, 1918, 6.

¹⁴ Kalvoda, "Masaryk in America," 98.

with fear of Germany and the fall of Austria-Hungary, swirled together and opened the door for Allied leaders to support a central Europe composed of small, independent states. Yet in subsequent months and years, a certain mythology developed around Masaryk—who became Czechoslovakia’s first president in November 1918—and the time he spent in America. Masaryk’s admiration of Wilson, liberalism, and democracy, and his stated desire to establish the same kind of polity in Czechoslovakia, only bolstered the symbolic significance of 1918 for U.S.-Czech relations. Though it bore just fragments of truth, people saw the relationship between Wilson and Masaryk as a powerful representation of America’s hand in helping bring about Czechoslovakia.¹⁵

In the immediate years following 1918, Czechoslovakia quickly stabilized itself, implementing democratic institutions and progressive laws. For the United States, Czechoslovakia’s successful founding years increased her reputation significantly, especially when compared to the instability coming from Austria, Poland, and Hungary.¹⁶ Having secured independence, Masaryk and his closest aides—of which Eduard Benes, Czechoslovakia’s first foreign minister, was most important—strove to reinforce Czechoslovakia’s international image: that she was central Europe’s standard-bearer of liberalism and democracy. Known collectively as the “castle group,” Masaryk, Benes, and other confidants maintained a well-oiled propaganda machine, aimed primarily at spreading Czechoslovakia’s reputation of being the greatest friend of Western ideals.¹⁷ Generally speaking the group’s efforts paid off, for it became common

¹⁵ Even fifty years after Masaryk’s death, the Library of Congress published a lengthy commemoration of Masaryk’s time in America, calling it the “best embodiment” of the “zenith of ties between the peoples of Czechoslovakia and America.” George Kovtun, *Masaryk and America: Testimony of a Relationship* (Washington D.C., Library of Congress, 1988), v.

¹⁶ Martin Zuckert, “National Concepts of Freedom and Government Pacification Policies: The Case of Czechoslovakia in the Transitional Period after 1918,” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 3 (2008): 325.

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of the “castle group” and its propaganda campaign, see Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011). Orzoff paints a fairly critical picture of Czechoslovakia, and she compellingly argues that Masaryk and his officials used

among American academics and correspondents to view Czechoslovakia as a great bastion of democracy in central Europe.¹⁸

By the 1930s, as Germany, Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Hungary accepted varying degrees of authoritarianism, Czechoslovakia the “bastion” became Czechoslovakia the “island”—a lone outpost of liberalism in an increasingly illiberal region. When the Munich crisis swelled perilously in 1938, American academics and correspondents—or “the liberals” in the words of some State Department officials—spoke passionately about the plight of Czechoslovakia, citing the country’s commitment to the ideals Americans held so dear. A ‘special bond,’ they said, compelled the United States to take greater cognizance of what was really happening to Prague.¹⁹

It is important to note that the special bond between Washington and Prague did not register with the United States as a whole. Rather, it manifested in primarily three spheres. First, it was an idea that the American and Czechoslovak governments could point to in official statements and interactions. Second, American foreign policy experts and correspondents,

undemocratic methods to bolster their democratic image abroad. Masaryk himself once admitted that “without a certain degree of dictatorship a democracy is no more.” Quoted in Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances 1926-1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 465-466. Scholars of Czech history, while agreeing with Orzoff’s argument concerning the efforts of “castle group,” push back against her characterization of Czechoslovakia as a total myth. For instance, in response to Orzoff’s thesis, Thomas Ort notes, “If Orzoff’s book explodes the Castle’s myths about the perfectly democratic and egalitarian nature of the First Republic, then it also points, backhandedly perhaps, to the ways in which the Castle was instrumental in preventing Czechoslovakia from veering off the democratic course altogether and into the same authoritarianism and nationalist chauvinism that engulfed so much of the rest of Europe. Whatever the weaknesses and shortcomings of its democracy, Czechoslovakia, by the mid-1930s, was the only non-authoritarian state in Europe east of the Rhine. For all of its very real flaws, that remains a genuine and remarkable achievement, not a myth.” Thomas Ort, “Review: Battle for Castle by Andrea Orzoff,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 4 (2011): 942.

¹⁸ These types of references are too numerous to count. For examples, see Hamilton Fish Armstrong, “Armistice at Munich,” *Foreign Affairs* 17, no. 2 (1939): 280; Harry Schneiderman, “Czechoslovakia,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 40 (1938): 222; “The Son of a Coachman,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1935, 19; and Shepard Stone, “A Democracy Amid Dictatorships,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1937, 150.

¹⁹ On the tendencies of “liberals,” George Kennan wrote, “I found myself unable to share that enthusiasm for democracy in Czechoslovakia that seemed almost an obsession to so many Anglo-Saxon liberals.” Kennan, “Memoirs Part II,” 21.

particularly those with specific connections to Czechoslovakia, championed U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Interestingly, their discussions of the unique significance of U.S.-Czechoslovak diplomacy began in earnest only when the crises of the 1930s came to the fore. It was then that they tirelessly exposed the injustices the Czechoslovaks faced and implored the country to take notice.²⁰ Third, private citizens of Czech and Slovak heritage worked hard to raise awareness and relief for Czechoslovakia amidst its crises.²¹ Apart from these three spheres, the vast majority of the population exercised to varying degrees a spirit of isolationism, and specific views regarding Czechoslovakia varied from sympathy to ignorance.²²

Before the crises of the 1930s erupted, however, the notion of a special bond was buried underneath normalcy, as diplomatic relations between the United States and Czechoslovakia assumed a traditional face in the aftermath of World War I.²³ Questions of trade dominated their interactions. Efforts by some individuals, such as Lewis Einstein, American diplomat to Czechoslovakia from 1921 to 1930, worked toward building cultural and social exchange, something which the Czechoslovaks approved of immensely, desiring closer ties to the United

²⁰ During the climax of the Munich crisis, one *Washington Post* correspondent called the United States' neutrality "contemptible," and argued that such indifference ought not to completely "blind this country to Czechoslovakia's triumph in defeat." "Triumphant in Defeat," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1938, 12. For similar views among academics and experts, see the work of correspondents Elizabeth Hawes, Dorothy Thompson, and G.E.R. Gedye.

²¹ A good representation of the prolific efforts of Czechoslovak-Americans is found in the papers of Edward Otto Tabor. Tabor, a Czech-American lawyer, worked tirelessly throughout the 1920s and 1930s to raise awareness about Czechoslovakia, including the shared values undergirding U.S.-Czech relations. After Munich, Tabor doubled-down on efforts to gather relief for the refugee crisis. See Edward Otto Tabor Papers, 1918-1948, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²² A clear example of this is seen in a 'Letter to the Editor' published in the *Washington Post* in which the author criticizes the prospect of U.S. involvement in any European crisis, concluding by saying, "If America wants really to help European democracy and freedom, then let us try with all our might to put our own house so in order that Europe will come to her senses and try to follow our example." Julian Wilbanks, "America and the Czech Crisis," *Washington Post*, September 15, 1938, 10.

²³ The most exhaustive treatment of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations during the interwar period is Elizabeth Murphy's "Initiative Help: United States-Czechoslovak Relations from Versailles to Munich," PhD diss., Cornell University, 1999. According to Murphy, "As the United States returned to normalcy and defined its interests, commercial and financial matters dominated its view."

States by any means possible.²⁴ To Prague's dismay, however, Washington was careful to avoid political ties. Fearful of being pulled into European crises, the State Department preferred to foster just economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres, often through private means, and responded with aloofness to Czechoslovakia's geopolitical problems.²⁵ Yet despite Washington's distance from political issues, the idea of a unique U.S.-Czechoslovak bond persisted into mid and late-1930s. Though the Depression significantly hurt trade between the two countries, positive cultural relations and a general tone of friendliness remained.

It was during this time, the late-1930s, when U.S.-Czechoslovak relations could be said to have been coasting along in a manner neither hot nor cold, that crisis struck Prague as well as the heart of the U.S.-Czechoslovak bond. As often is the case, the crisis emerged from slow-burning problems, and unfortunately for Prague, it faced difficulties both inside and outside its borders.²⁶ The major issue externally was Hitler. Since his accession to power in 1933, he had enacted an aggressive foreign policy and rearmament program. From Prague's vantage point, if the growing Nazi menace were not checked, it would only be a matter of time before it reared its

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Murphy's thesis lays a strong case for America's focus on economic, not political, matters in its relations with Czechoslovakia. That being said, two incidents bookending Czechoslovakia's First Republic aptly demonstrate the U.S. government's unwillingness to involve itself in Prague's geopolitical problems. First, in 1920, Czechoslovakia and Poland disputed rights to a region called Teschen. The situation ballooned into a miniature crisis, and the U.S. government, though privy to details and concerned with the outcome, did its best to encourage a solution that placed zero "moral obligation" on the United States. Lansing to Wallace, August 27, 1920, *FRUS*, 1920, Vol. I, 66. Later, in 1938, when the Czechoslovak-German crisis reached a critical point, Sumner Welles, undersecretary of state, explained to the Czechoslovak ambassador the U.S. government's role in the matter: "...the policy of the United States, which I was sure the Minister knew, as supported by the majority of the people of this country, was to remain completely aloof from any involvement in European affairs." Sumner Welles, "Memorandum of Conversation," March 14, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 485.

²⁶ The best treatment of Czechoslovakia's 1930s crises from the Czechoslovak point-of-view can be found in Igor Lukes' *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Eduard Benes in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Olivova, *The Doomed Democracy*, 162-257; and Keith Eubank, "Munich," in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*, 239-252.

ugly head. With Hitler's Anschluss in March 1938, this reality crept frighteningly close to Czechoslovakia.²⁷

What made Hitler so problematic to Prague, though, was his interest in Czechoslovakia's internal crisis. This crisis revolved around a particular region of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. Comprising the outer rim of Bohemia and Moravia along the German-Austrian frontier, the bow-shaped territory was home to over three million ethnic Germans. Upon the Republic's founding, the Prague government granted the Sudeten Germans full minority rights and, considering the day and age, treated the Sudeten Germans quite equitably.²⁸ This decent treatment meant little to disgruntled elements within the Sudetenland, however, whose anti-Czechoslovak agenda gained credence when the Czech-Germans suffered disproportionately during the Depression.²⁹ By the mid and late-1930s discontent within the Sudeten German Party, led by Konrad Henlein, welled up, and the party began calling for increased autonomy and far-reaching concessions from the central government.

²⁷ For an acclaimed account of the Anschluss, see Gordon Brook-Shepherd, *Anschluss: The Rape of Austria* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963). G.E.R. Gedye, a *New York Times* correspondent who reported from both Austria and Czechoslovakia during their respective crises, chronicles the Anschluss in *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (New York: Gollancz, 1939). For the State Department's handling of the Anschluss, see *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 399-492.

²⁸ Recent historiography of Czechoslovakia's First Republic (1918-1938) has argued for a more nuanced understanding of the country during that time. Czechoslovakia, despite the collective mythology, was not a perfect democracy, nor was it completely liberal and equitable in its treatment of minorities, including the Sudeten Germans. Mary Heimann's *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013) is the most critical recent treatment of Czechoslovakia, as Heimann identifies Czech chauvinism as the chief reason for Czechoslovakia's historical struggles. Most scholars, including Igor Lukes, feel Heimann stretched her argument thin, noting that all serious students of central Europe understand that Czechoslovakia's democracy was far from perfect, and that the First Republic made its fair share of mistakes, especially in the years leading up to Munich. For careful, specific analyses of the First Republic's complex identity, see Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); and Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*.

²⁹ See Patrick Crowhurst, *Hitler and Czechoslovakia in World War II: Domination and Retaliation* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), introduction.

With Austria having been absorbed, Hitler focused his attention on Czechoslovakia. By this time, Henlein's party had firmly aligned itself with Nazism and was sewing havoc through anti-Czech propaganda campaigns. It was a convenient setup for Hitler, who saw the Sudeten Germans as perfect and willing pawns to be used for the purposes of Nazi expansion, all under the guise of 'self-determination.' In speeches to jeering Reichstag crowds, Hitler vehemently denounced Prague's oppressive rule over the Sudeten Germans, claiming the Czechoslovak government desired to "annihilate" its German minority. Throughout the spring and summer, Hitler threatened armed conflict unless Prague were to grant the Sudetenland its autonomy.³⁰

Czechoslovakia, now led by Masaryk's favorite son, Eduard Benes, who had assumed the presidency in 1935, refused to give in to Sudeten pressure. Not only were Henlein's demands unconstitutional, but to relinquish jurisdiction over the Sudetenland, even if only partially, would have risked the eventual loss of the region as a whole. The Sudetenland was industrially rich, and many, including Benes, did not consider the Republic viable without it. Czechoslovakia had reasons to be confident in its refusal, too. She boasted one of the best militaries and some of the strongest defense fortifications in Europe. She also had defensive pacts with both France and the Soviet Union, increasing her chances of surviving a German attack.³¹

Britain and France, however, had no desire to see what might come of a German-Czechoslovak war. Britain was not prepared to enter a conflict, and France was equally disinclined despite its pact with Prague. They began placing heavy pressure on Czechoslovakia to resolve the dispute peacefully. Unfortunately for Prague, their efforts for a peaceful solution

³⁰ "Hitler Said to Aim at Awing Czechs," *New York Times*, April 28, 1938, 6; "Herr Hitler's Speech of September 12, 1938," *Bulletin of International News* 15, no. 19 (September 1938): 8-11. Hitler first insinuated intervening on behalf of the Sudeten Germans in a February 1938 Reichstag speech, which caught the attention of not only Czechoslovaks but observers around the world. "Herr Hitler's Speech of February 20," *Bulletin of International News* 15, no. 5 (March 1938): 23-27.

³¹ For detailed discussion of Czechoslovakia's treaties with France and the Soviet Union—both their origins and outplays—see Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler*, 70-86.

reflected hostility and disinterest toward Prague's situation, primarily on Britain's part.³² For instance, in summer 1938, the British sent a nongovernmental representative, Lord Runciman, to Prague to mediate between the Sudeten Germans and Czech government. Far from being a balanced, nuanced investigation of the issues, Lord Runciman spent most his time enjoying the company of Sudeten German leaders while concluding the Czechs to be stubborn trouble makers who should part with the Sudetenland.

In September, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain intervened directly as a mediator to the Czech-German crisis. After a meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, Hitler's alpine retreat, Chamberlain, along with Prime Minister Edouard Daladier of France, pressured Czechoslovakia to cede territory with a majority German population. With great misgiving, Benes accepted the 'Anglo-French proposal' on September 21, but by that time Chamberlain was already on his way to Godesberg for another meeting with Hitler. There, the Fuhrer increased his demands considerably, infuriating Chamberlain, who was forced to reject the new terms. At that point circumstances looked very grim, and the involved parties mobilized for war. An eleventh-hour invitation from Hitler to Chamberlain, Daladier, and Premier Benito Mussolini of Italy on September 29 delayed possible hostilities. Then, in the early hours of September 30, the four powers, at the exclusion of Czechoslovakia, agreed to terms that granted Hitler the Sudetenland.³³

³² See Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler*, 135. For an interesting counterargument, see Jonathan Zorach, "The British View of the Czechs in the Era before the Munich Crisis," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 57, no. 1 (1979): 56-70.

³³ Historian Robert Dallek adds that Mussolini dominated the discussions, as he was the only one who could speak all four languages. Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166.

The United States, quite naturally, refused serious involvement in the Czech-German standoff.³⁴ The 1930s, beginning particularly in 1933 with Roosevelt and Hitler's assumptions of leadership, saw Washington struggle in its efforts to balance its overseas interests, which were primarily related to trade and disarmament, with its desire to be politically aloof.³⁵ The extent of American involvement came in the form of two messages Roosevelt sent where he encouraged those involved—Prague, Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome—to vigorously pursue peaceful mediation.³⁶ Meanwhile, in Prague, the American legation, led by Minister Wilbur J. Carr, represented the United States' detached disposition. This did not have an adverse on relations between Washington and Prague, however, as the Benes government did not expect the United States to intervene in any major way—that expectation was reserved for France and England. For the morsel of involvement Roosevelt did extend, his two messages, Benes was quite grateful.³⁷ Still, when viewed from a distance, it was not a high point in time for U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. The unwillingness, and for all intents and purposes the *inability*, of the United States to actively support Prague in its political crisis was the opening death knell of their friendly bond.

³⁴ The fullest analysis of the United States' role in the crisis leading up to Munich is James Baker's "The United States and the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1938-1939," PhD diss., Tulane University, 1971. Baker concludes that during the Munich crisis, chief advisers to Roosevelt stood on both sides of the issue while the president himself, though vacillating in his stance toward appeasement, remained steadfast in a policy of noninvolvement. Baker argues that Munich served as an important turning point in U.S. policy as it quickly convinced Roosevelt, and others, that the country would need to take a stand against Germany through measures short of war.

³⁵ For a solid appraisal of U.S. policy toward Europe in the 1930s, and with particular focus on U.S.-German relations, see Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). The final chapters deal specifically with America's handling of the Czech-German crisis.

³⁶ The exact nature of Roosevelt's intentions during the Munich crisis is debated by historians. For important perspectives on the subject, see Basil Rauch, *Roosevelt From Munich to Pearl Harbor: A Study in the Creation of a Foreign Policy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967), 13-79; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 101-198; Offner, *American Appeasement*, 180-200; and Barbara Farnham, "Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: Insights from Prospect Theory," *Political Psychology* 13, no. 2 (1992): 205-235.

³⁷ Benes sent a personal response to Roosevelt's message that stated, "Czechoslovakia is grateful to you, Mr. President, for your message which in these grave moments can contribute toward a just solution of the dispute. I believe that even today the dispute could be settled in a spirit of equity without resort to force and the whole Czechoslovak nation still hopes this will be the case." Quoted in Rauch, *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 76.

The Munich crisis was the practical outworking of Washington's longstanding policy of remaining aloof. As a result, neither Roosevelt nor the State Department had any say in Czechoslovakia's loss of the Sudetenland.

Most treatments of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations end there. Perhaps in an epilogue or concluding chapter Munich's aftermath and Germany's occupation of the Czech lands are discussed, but if so only in brief.³⁸ Studies that do consider at length American policy in the months following Munich tend to do so from a broad view, usually from the Roosevelt Administration's or State Department's perspective, and they do not offer much discussion on the precise issue of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. That is what this study seeks to do, first and foremost: to provide a thorough account of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations in the period between Munich and the Nazi invasion of Poland. In those eleven months, the two countries experienced a radical transformation in the nature of their relations, though it often occurred in a gradual, unassuming manner. The consequences, though, really were radical. If Munich indicated that the 'special bond' between Prague and Washington—those mythicized ideas of Masaryk, Wilson, and their shared values—was impractical, largely owing to U.S. isolationism, then the months that came after proved, again and again, its complete impotence. The United States, due to its unique position (it was an ocean away and dominated by public opinion which said 'no' to European entanglement), was spared both Prague's consternation and expectation of direct help. The result was a situation in which American diplomats and officials retained friendly feelings with Czechoslovakia as they watched it disappear before their eyes.

Though this study aims to provide a holistic view of the United States' diplomatic responses to Czechoslovakia's post-Munich existence, its focus lies in Prague and the American

³⁸ This is the case for Murphy's "Initiative Help" and Baker's "The United States and the Czechoslovak Crisis," which remain the most exhaustive analyses of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.

officials working there, with particular attention paid to Wilbur Carr and George Kennan. There are a few reasons for this. First, the American legation in Prague was on the frontlines of dealing with post-Munich Czechoslovakia, observing and reporting its nuanced crises in real time. In studying the efforts of those working from the Schonborn, one finds stark, active examples of the special bond's impotence. And since the days' crises were taking place in Czechoslovakia, the legation's observations, analyses, and opinions serve as the most complete and helpful depiction of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations at play.

Second, Washington, though assuredly interested in what was happening in Czechoslovakia, was not in a position to actively address the developments. Once peace, however flimsy or temporary, had been secured at Munich, the Roosevelt Administration and State Department had little role to play in its aftermath. As long as the European countries haggled and agreed that 'all was well,' then there was no need to seriously interact with what was happening in Prague. Thus, in the time between Munich and the March occupation, Washington had little to say and even less to do in regard to Czechoslovakia. That is not to say that Washington had nothing to say about the development of European geopolitics. Far from it. Roosevelt and the State Department were very active in appraising the circumstances surrounding Hitler, Chamberlain, and Mussolini.³⁹ They did not, however, keep painstaking tabs on the specifics of what was happening in Czechoslovakia. The American legation in Prague, on the other hand, had no such luxury. Like officials back home, it had no part in the post-Munich drama, other than to watch, listen, and report the circumstances as they came. But unlike Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, or others in Washington, Carr and his team were

³⁹ Roosevelt and the State Department's concern with foreign policy, and in this case European foreign policy, is documented in any number of books and articles, but a good example that addresses both is *For the President Personal & Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, ed. Orville Bullitt (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

daily confronted by the realities of post-Munich Czechoslovakia. It was their responsibility to watch Prague try to reorient itself and consolidate its rump state.

The study is divided into four parts, two of which center on what could be called crucial moments, with the other two unpacking larger periods of time. The first chapter, “Realization,” examines the ‘moment’ of Munich and its immediate aftermath, when both the American legation and State Department attempted to respond to the crisis’s implications. During this time, people everywhere learned the true extent of Munich’s provisions, which turned out to be far more crippling for Czechoslovakia than what many had anticipated. Thus, very quickly the universal sigh of relief that came from the avoidance of war turned to somber realization that Germany now possessed nearly total leverage in Czechoslovakia’s future. Prague’s miserable situation was made worse by territorial demands from other neighbors, internal discontent within its eastern provinces, and the refugee and economic crises set aflame by Munich. The American legation watched these events in rapid succession without any ability to lend meaningful support, signaling the inherent impotence of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, despite their continuing friendliness.

The second chapter, “Consolidation,” addresses a larger period of time, centering on the legation’s reporting during the Second Republic. During this five-month period between Munich and the March occupation, the Czech and Slovak state, now going by Czecho-Slovakia, struggled to pull itself together and consolidate its revised frontiers. The chief difficulty lay in sufficiently pleasing Hitler while maintaining a semblance of independence. Though descriptions of the policy enacted by the Prague government’s leaders during this time range from “heroic” to “traitorous,” the American legation’s dispatches indicate a country and government in utterly pitiable circumstances. Furthermore, it was during this time that American observers also began

differentiating Czechs from Slovaks and Ruthenes, undermining the idea of a Czechoslovak state altogether. Much like what happened at Munich, the American legation remained a passive observer throughout the Second Republic's gradual disintegration, constituting an unavoidable low-point in U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.

The third chapter, "Occupation," discusses another 'moment'—the immediate context of Hitler's March 15 occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. It was arguably the most crystallized depiction of the underlying impotence of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Though sympathetic to the Czechs' embattled existence, neither the American legation nor Washington could do anything to prevent Czecho-Slovakia's complete destruction. The event also reinforced the difficulties posed to those at the Schonborn in trying to analyze the currents of central Europe. Though never confident in Czecho-Slovakia's prospects at consolidation following Munich, the American legation still found itself caught off guard by Hitler's march into Prague. Ultimately, the occupation proved to be a major turning point. In regard to the international situation, it fully discredited Hitler and set Europe on a path to war. For U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, it signaled the end of an era, for U.S.-Czechoslovak relations would not formally reemerge until after the war, by which time the friendliness that typified pre-war U.S.-Czechoslovak relations failed to resurface.

Finally, the fourth chapter, "Documentation," traces the work done by the few American officials who remained in Prague following the occupation. Like chapter two, it tackles a broader period of time, the roughly five months between the March occupation and Germany's invasion of Poland. With Czecho-Slovakia officially removed from the map, American observers, particularly George F. Kennan, wrestled with big questions about the region's future. His analyses, along with those completed by American consulates, demonstrate the ways in which

the occupation fundamentally transformed the very idea of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Following the occupation, Hungary snatched Ruthenia; Slovakia secured its autonomy; and Eduard Benes established a Czech government-in-exile, all while the Czech government in Prague hunkered down under German rule with the sole goal of keeping the Czech national spirit alive. Thus, the entire concept of a single, Czechoslovak state blurred to the maximum, and U.S.-Czechoslovak relations became buried under looming war.

Together, the four sections show how in the final eleven months before World War II, U.S.-Czechoslovak relations proved impotent in the face of external pressures and crises. The notion of uniquely friendly or special relations between the United States and Czechoslovakia, which had come to the forefront *because* of the crises at hand, did not translate into any American ability to prevent Czechoslovakia's ultimate destruction at the hands of Germany. At its core, however, U.S.-Czechoslovak diplomacy is not a story of failure, but one of cold, hard realities. The difficulties inherent to U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, despite their common values, were very much rooted in America's lack of influence and presence in central Europe as a whole. Munich opened the Pandora's box of central European power struggles, many of which had been lying dormant since the Versailles Treaty. Once Hitler embarked on his insatiable foreign policy, the door was opened for many more countries and peoples to pursue their own goals and pet projects. Unfortunately for the Prague government, Czechoslovakia's lands were often at the center of other nations' campaigns, and once irredentist and revisionist momentum began, it was impossible to stop. Those at the Schonborn and those at the State Department lacked both the ability and desire to exercise significant influence in the "dizzily rocking continent."⁴⁰ Thus, the events that transpired between September 1938 and September 1939 tested the limits of U.S.-

⁴⁰ George Kennan, *From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 215.

Czechoslovak relations, exposed their impotence, and set a pattern of passive “wait-and-see” conduct toward central Europe that would have profound implications in the postwar world.

Chapter One: “Realization”

There, in the brightly lighted room, I came upon the minister sleeping peacefully in an armchair. The servants stood respectfully behind the curtains of the dining room, not daring to wake him. The sight of the old gentleman, thus peacefully at rest in the solitary splendor of his heavily curtained salons while outside in the growing darkness a Europe seething with fear and hatred and excitement danced its death dance all around us, struck me as a symbolic enactment of the helplessness of all forces of order and decency, at that moment, in the face of the demonic powers that history has now unleashed.¹

George F. Kennan’s stirring memory of Wilbur J. Carr, the American minister in Prague, and his cozy armchair nap, came just a couple days after the Munich Agreement had shocked the world. In the months leading up to September 30, threats of war and destruction loomed over Prague, and the primary question was whether the seemingly inevitable war would be local or continent-wide.² Munich ended such grim talk, at least for a time, but the relief that came from war having been averted did not mean that all of the crisis’s aspects immediately dissipated. Many details were not yet settled, and many questions remained unanswered. Would the transfer of territory occur peacefully? Would the Czechoslovak government remain? Would Poland and Hungary wait patiently for their scraps of land? Would Slovakia leave the Republic? They were all vitally important questions, ones that could determine the future course of central Europe, but as Kennan realized when looking upon his dozing boss, there was little the Americans could do. The inability of the American legation to be anything but a ‘passive observer’ to the Munich crisis and beyond was one of many realizations for those at the Schonborn, and one that signaled the relative powerlessness of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, no matter how friendly they might be, in a region overcome by ruthless external forces.

¹ George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 90.

² Carr to Secretary of State, “No. 271,” October 14, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, Vol. 68, 800-Czechoslovakia, 1-4. In an October 14 dispatch, Carr reported that throughout the September crisis, President Benes repeated his commitment to a defensive war only, and that up until Munich expressed optimism that France would come to Czechoslovakia’s aid.

If through Munich American observers discovered the general impotence of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, they also realized something about the region itself—its dizzying complexity. Once, when describing central Europe, Kennan observed that it was a place where, more than anything else, “jealousies run so high.”³ The American diplomat may have had a long view of history in mind, but the twenty years that had come and gone since World War I were sufficient to highlight the region’s ‘jealousies.’ Most of all, the central European states, not least of which Czechoslovakia, were jealous of their borders. With the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire came the successor states, and with the successor states came the redrawing of central Europe’s map.⁴ Each country fought hard to attain the borders it felt it deserved, whether out of historical consideration, racial homogeneity, or economic necessity. At the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, no country achieved all it desired, though some had received a good portion of their claims, particularly Czechoslovakia. Others emerged feeling bitter.⁵ Unfortunately, then, Versailles left central Europe in a precarious, jealous state. It must be said that all the fault cannot be laid at the feet of those who commissioned Versailles as the complexities of central Europe were centuries deep and impossibly complex. But nonetheless, the decisions and treaties that took place from 1918-1920 helped produce bitterness, insecurity, and envy over the region’s new borders, so that in 1938 and 1939, and spurred on by the unprecedented aspirations of Adolf

³ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 8.

⁴ For a recent and compelling treatment of the Habsburg Empire, see Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016). For discussion specifically on the successor states, see pages 385-455. In his previous work, Judson examined the interplay of Habsburg and Czechoslovak identities, and he has inspired numerous scholars to develop more nuanced understandings of Czechoslovakia’s interwar history.

⁵ The most prominent countries that felt shortchanged by Versailles were Germany, Hungary, and Poland, all of which would satisfy their revisionist desires through the Munich settlement and subsequent dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Adrian Webb, *The Routledge Companion to Central and Eastern Europe Since 1919* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9-17. Germany, still the dominant central European power coming out of World War I, looked to redress what it saw as Versailles’ injustices in the 1930s. All other central European states had to act in light of Germany’s policy. Webb distinguishes between Poland’s and Hungary’s aims, though. Poland was more ambitious, and as Webb indicates, naïve, as Warsaw sought security, expansion, and ‘great power’ status. Hungary’s concerns were more limited. Embittered by Versailles, it sought to rectify its altered borders.

Hitler, American diplomats, officials, and correspondents witnessed the powerful outpouring of these intense feelings.

For Kennan, Carr, and other American officials serving in Prague, the fervent attention paid to national boundaries in central Europe was difficult to comprehend. The United States enjoyed two friendly neighbors to the north and south, and two oceans to the east and west. Its borders were settled. Czechoslovakia could hardly have been more different. Landlocked and surrounded by nations that to various degrees disliked her, she was as vulnerable as the United States was secure. Germany curled around Czechoslovakia's western province, Bohemia. To the south of Moravia, Czechoslovakia's central province, lay Austria. Thus, after the Anschluss, Bohemia had to confront the miserable prospect of being a Reich enclave. On the map, it looked as though a great German pincer were clamping down on Prague. To the north of Moravia and Slovakia stood Poland. The last of the hostile powers, Hungary, stretched across Slovakia's southern frontier. And finally, in Ruthenia, the eastern most province, Czechoslovakia shared a border with Rumania. Though only eighty miles long, Prague's connection to Bucharest was important in that the two were allies—the lone friendly neighbor for the Czechs and Slovaks. In the immediate days following Munich, the American legation observed as Czechoslovakia's three not-so-friendly neighbors pressed for territorial concessions.

When Carr arrived in Prague in fall 1937, he was already sixty-seven-years-old. He had spent his entire career in the State Department, entering the service in the 1890s and working his way up to an assistant secretary position. His responsibilities primarily lay in overseeing the consular department, for which he would always maintain a special attachment.⁶ In the 1920s, Carr was instrumental in the passage of the Rogers Act, which combined the consular and

⁶ Katherine Crane, *Mr. Carr of State: Forty-Seven Years in the Department of State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960), 48-76.

diplomatic services, making for a more streamlined foreign service. Over the next decade, one would find Carr at congressional hearings haggling with senators for funds, or at his desk, where he saw to it that America's strict immigration quotas were followed, and he sorted out endless administrative problems that sprung forth from U.S. embassies around the globe. Along the way, he garnered the unofficial title, "Father of the Foreign Service."

Roosevelt's election in 1932 brought some drama to the State Department. Roosevelt was never particularly fond of the foreign service, finding it conservative, stagnant, and in the way of his own ideas on foreign policy.⁷ As a result, he tended to play officials off one another, knowing that interdepartmental rivalries would make it easier for him to be his own secretary of state. Some grew frustrated with Carr, who never seemed to manage the divisions well, and by the mid-1930s the department had become a noxious mix of career men and partisan appointees, old guard conservatives, and New Deal Democrats. Things came to a head in 1935 when Undersecretary William Phillips became minister in Rome, leaving his former position open. It was hotly contested, and Carr may even have thrown his hat in the ring. It ended up going to Sumner Welles, a close confidant of Roosevelt, and the appointment was followed by a major reshuffling of the department to better align it with the administration's guiding principles.

The department's changing face made Carr persona non-grata in a mild form.⁸ The result was a reassignment to Prague to serve as its head of mission. The State Department, led by the

⁷ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 532-533. Interestingly, this is the quality that Kennan most noticed in his only face-to-face interaction with Roosevelt. When serving as the chargé to Portugal in 1943, Kennan ran into a confusing predicament in which different departments expected different solutions. He eventually secured a one-on-one meeting with Roosevelt to clear the air, and Roosevelt advised Kennan to pursue a course of action different than that which was expected from the State Department and Pentagon. Kennan, naturally, expressed concerns about the divergence of opinion. "'Oh, don't worry,' said the President with a debonair wave of his cigarette holder, 'about those *people* over there.'" Kennan, *Memoirs*, 161.

⁸ According to Carr's biographer, Katharine Crane, Carr experienced "gradual estrangement" during Roosevelt's presidency. Carr did not like the undefined roles of the assistant secretaries, nor Roosevelt's tendency to use informal channels, which often led to the president's confidants, particularly Sumner Welles, bypassing Cordell Hull in communicating with the president. Hull, always cautious, never pushed back against Welles and others'

cautious and virtuous Cordell Hull, packaged the transfer as a way of honoring Carr, who had devoted his whole life to the foreign service. There was probably a good measure of truth to this, but there is little doubt that the decision to ‘honor’ Carr was made easier by the belief that he no longer had a place in Washington. Carr, though ready for retirement, thought better of himself than to turn down the president’s request. Prague also happened to be the one city where he had an interest of serving.

Throughout his years as an assistant secretary of state, Carr came into contact with every corner of the foreign service. Thus, when news got out that the ‘old man’ had received the title of minister, everyone was extremely pleased. The only one who seemed to have reservations was Carr himself, but his well-wishers were too excited to notice. “No one, however, seems to share my views,” Carr wrote in a letter William Phillips, “and so I am going, and will give the best I have to the work until such time as the President may feel I may retire.”⁹ Carr received hundreds of letters from his colleagues, congratulating him on a well-earned caper to a distinguished career and telling him that he would have a wonderful “sojourn” in Prague. Carr hoped so, too, but he could not help but notice Central Europe’s volatile nature. Some, such as William Bullitt, ambassador to Paris, tempered their congratulations with warnings of the difficulties posed by the international climate. Beyond the unpredictable nature of European geopolitics, of which Carr was admittedly ignorant, he worried about not knowing the language, customs, or history of Czechoslovakia. Always a scrupulous student, he learned as much as he could before his departure.¹⁰

direct lines to Roosevelt. All these things discouraged Carr, and by the mid-1930s, “Carr was increasingly aware of himself as standing in the way of some men’s ambitions for their own advancement and some men’s desires for a different kind of administration of the Department’s resources.” Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 237.

⁹ Carr to William Phillips, August 6, 1937, “Correspondence 1936-1937,” Box 13, Wilbur Carr Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰ Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 329-331.

Carr arrived in Prague on September 9, 1937, and within two days he was “in love with his legation.”¹¹ He found the Schonborn Palace splendid, charming, and comfortable, and he anticipated having a wonderful time as minister.¹² Throughout the first few months, the minister and his wife enjoyed sampling the best of Prague’s cultural scene, and they liked the Czech people, too. One of his first official tasks was a somber and important event—Tomas Masaryk’s funeral. Roosevelt had designated Carr as his personal representative, and as a result, Carr walked directly behind the coffin during the funeral procession. The outpouring of grief from the populace over its president-liberator’s death left an indelible impression on Carr, and he could not help but reflect on its significance, as well as what made Czechoslovakia special: “This day and the past 4 days have been the greatest manifestation of affection for a single human being that I have ever known. A man who was born a peasant, but through dint of hard work and great determination became a professor, and then a great patriot and statesman, the main factor in setting up this free democratic government in the midst of dictatorships...”¹³

By early 1938, the Sudeten controversy had come to a head as a result of the Anschluss and Konrad Henlein’s ‘eight-point program.’ Shoddy reconnaissance caused Czechoslovakia to mobilize its army in late-May, and for a few days it looked as though war were imminent.¹⁴ Tensions remained high throughout the spring and summer. For Carr, then, his nice “sojourn” was turning into an extremely taxing assignment, and the entire legation staff felt the weight of the danger that might come. In Prague, Carr, embassy officials, and the consular staff worked well together, and a certain measure of camaraderie developed due to the growing crisis.

¹¹ Personal notes of Mrs. Carr, “Highlights of 1937,” Box 6, Carr Papers.

¹² Carr to Hugh Gibson, September 10, 1937, “Correspondence 1936-1937,” Box 13, Carr Papers; Carr to Leo S. Rowe, October 19, 1937, Box 13, Carr Papers.

¹³ Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 336.

¹⁴ Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler*, 78.

Secretaries of legation Raymond E. Cox and Vinton Chapin worked directly under Carr. Irving Linnell ran the consular staff. There were others, of course, such as the legation's "indispensable" interpreters, Frank Novotny and Francis Hejno.¹⁵ In case of war, the Germans would undoubtedly seek to execute quick air raids on Prague, and with the Schonborn being in direct proximity to the Hrad, it was very likely that the palace would be an early casualty. Shortly after arriving, Carr had learned from Cox that the British had long been constructing bombproof shelters and cellars to protect embassy staff. Later in the spring, Carr cabled the department, inquiring about the possibility of building a bombproof shelter near the Schonborn. The department did not like the sound of the project, namely the expenses involved, and wondered why a converted cellar in the Schonborn would not do the trick. When hearing that the cellars were not workable, the department suggested an offsite location.¹⁶

In May Carr found a potentially suitable offsite location, the Zbraslav castle, located about six miles from the city center. Unfortunately, it was lacking everything from heat to electricity to "sanitary conveniences."¹⁷ At last with the department's blessing, Carr began pursuing the construction of a bombproof shelter. Naturally a series of obstacles prevented much progress from taking place, and by September, when the Czech-German crisis was looking especially bleak, the shelter still only existed on paper. Frantically, as the crisis unfolded, the legation got to work on preparing the Zbraslav for emergency habitation.

It was clear, however, that Zbraslav would be a less than satisfactory solution due to its distance from the Schonborn. As Carr and others from legation stressed in dispatches to the department, the Czechs were experts at blackouts. This was in part due to the fact that the

¹⁵ Carr to Hull, "No. 278," October 28, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 16.

¹⁶ Undated diary entry, "Diaries, 1937-1942," March 24, 1938, Box 6, Carr Papers.

¹⁷ Carr to Secretary of State, "No. 278," October 28, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 7.

Czechoslovak government issued the most “minute” instructions for the crisis, and the people carried them out with precision. During air raid drills, then, Prague’s streets turned “dark as pitch.” All automobiles were required to have blue coverings placed over their lights, resulting in an eerie glow resembling sinister “will-o-the-wisps.”¹⁸ In a September report to the State Department, Carr explained the utter fiasco that would result in trying to move the entire legation’s staff, by car, to the castle in the event of an air raid. With only a few minutes between the start of the alarm and the dropping of bombs, it would be impossible for the staff to effectively motor through Prague’s labyrinthine streets with people running frantically and the city in full blackout. “Only a person who has had to travel the streets of a large city during a blackout can have any appreciation of the difficulties involved,” mused Carr.¹⁹

Throughout September, as the legation scrambled to put together a safe plan for emergency, it also reported day and night the progress of the Czech-German crisis. Tensions had reached a boiling point, and the American legation witnessed the public become increasingly on edge. Blackouts, gossip of imminent air raids, and the endless alarms brought about by looming war kept the Schönborn in a worried state.²⁰ Carr expressed concerns among the legation, as well as “responsible” Czech circles, that civil war might soon breakout in the Sudetenland.²¹ The

¹⁸ Carr to Hull, “No. 278,” October 28, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 11.

¹⁹ Ibid. The shelter was not completed until after the crisis had passed. In his *Memoirs*, Kennan notes the irony, “It was, as I recall it, the only shelter of this sort to be completed for any sort of our diplomatic missions in Europe before the outbreak of war. It is an eloquent commentary on the difficulty of foresight in international affairs that not only was this the first of our diplomatic premises to be abandoned—abandoned, in fact, before the war had really begun and long before any bombs began to fall—but that Prague itself was almost the only European capital to escape any serious measure of aerial destruction.” Kennan, *Memoirs*, 88.

²⁰ Carr to Hull, “No. 278,” October 28, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 4. Of those “endless alarms,” Carr recalled a time when American officials noticed large quantities of smoke coming from the chimneys of the German legation, causing scraps of burned paper to fall into Schönborn’s garden. Surviving scraps bore evidence to correspondence with England and Sudeten party leaders, suggesting that the Germans were destroying evidence in anticipation of major hostilities.

²¹ Carr to Hull, September 16, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 585. One of Carr’s Czech friends informed him that the Czech population would soon “break their self control,” a telling statement considering the Czechs were known for their restrained behavior.

region was being overrun with German propaganda campaigns attempting to misrepresent and provoke incidents. Czech officials worked hard to maintain order, and on the whole, Czechoslovak citizens kept their composure. Carr and the legation were amazed by the national display of order and calm.²² Still, as far as they could tell, Prague would fight if the Germans moved to occupy. Military personnel were eager; the country's defensive fortifications were good; the people were loyal; and government officials from President Benes to Prime Minister Milan Hodza to Foreign Minister Kamil Krofta indicated that, if forced to, Czechoslovakia would defend herself.²³

After the revelation of Hitler's Godesberg memorandum on September 24, Benes told Carr with somber fatalism that such proposals equaled the "assassination of the state," and that he and his people would rather die than accept Godesberg's terms.²⁴ Carr seemed genuinely angered by reports of the memorandum. In his message to the department, he stressed Hitler's "uncompromising" tone, and he explicitly rejected Hitler's cries of Czech maltreatment of the Sudeten Germans. He cited investigations undertaken by the legation, supported by evidence from "impartial sources," that any 'maltreatment' was the deliberate invention of the German press.²⁵ Then, under heavy pressure from Britain and France, Czechoslovakia acquiesced to the

²² Carr to Hull, September 23, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 617. Carr wrote in part, "The Czechs have regained control in most places. Government's prompt restoration of order and the people's full response to the measures have been astonishing in the circumstances. In Prague itself an abnormal calm prevails."

²³ Carr to Hull, September 22, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 609.

²⁴ Carr to Hull, September 25, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 625.

²⁵ Carr to Hull, September 24, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 620. "The evidence seems to me to be convincing that incident after incident has been deliberately provoked by the Sudeten Germans undoubtedly supported by German authorities; the facts in regard to those incidents have been deliberately perverted and often completely altered; the whole course of the so-called negotiations of the Czechoslovak Government with the Sudeten Germans has been attended on their part by procrastination, vagueness, and bad faith and, when the negotiations were on the point of attaining success under the Runciman mission, incidents were deliberately created to furnish a plausible excuse for discontinuing negotiations until the Nuremberg speech which stirred the Sudeten elements to increased violence which has culminated in the existing critical situation. A survey of the record leaves no room for doubt that if a war occurs Germany must bear the responsibility for deliberately bringing it about. Without seeking to overlook definite shortcomings on the part of the Czechs in the past, I feel it can truthfully be

so called ‘Anglo-French proposals’ on September 21 which, among other details, granted Germany the Sudetenland. Chamberlain was in for a rude awakening at Godesberg, however, where Hitler vehemently rejected the proposals and increased his demands significantly. Those at the Schonborn reported the news in a foreboding manner, and the Czechs and Germans mobilized for war. Then came Roosevelt’s pleas, Mussolini’s intercession, and the midnight meeting of Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini, culminating in the Munich agreement. Without an ally with which to fight, and in danger of becoming the international pariah, Czechoslovakia bowed to pressure and accepted the terms.²⁶ For at least a time, war had been avoided.

In the final days leading up to Munich, Washington played only a small and mostly insignificant role. The United States, an ocean away and protected from intervention by a public opinion that wanted no such thing, remained neutral throughout 1938. The Roosevelt Administration and State Department certainly did not want to see war, though, and as Czech-German hostilities ramped up in late-September, Roosevelt grew inclined toward encouraging peace. Alarming dispatches had been pouring onto the desks of Roosevelt and Hull during August and September, with many urging the president to intervene in some way.²⁷ Hull warned Roosevelt against action, fearing that the president, and by extension the United States, would be forever tied to whatever plan the British and French were hatching.²⁸ Department officials in

said that their self restraint and patience in the face of great provocation, their recognition of their responsibility for making every possible effort to preserve world peace have been superb.”

²⁶ Hurban to Hull, September 29, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 679. In a message to the State Department and Roosevelt Administration, the Prague government said in part, “Elevating the interests of the civilized world and peace and harmony above the tragic feelings of its own people, it has decided to make this sacrifice which, never before in history was required under such concentrated pressure of an undefeated State without war.”

²⁷ Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 586.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 591. When recalling his discussions with Roosevelt, he writes, “I said to the President I felt that the evidence we had been receiving was overwhelming that Germany was armed to the teeth and was bent on widespread aggression at all hazards, and that nothing short of a sufficient amount of force or complete capitulation

Washington agreed with Hull, concerned specifically with the possibility that a statement by Roosevelt might associate the country with “selling the Czechs down the river.”²⁹

After Chamberlain and the Czechs rejected Hitler’s Godesberg demands, a general war looked inevitable. It was at this time, when Hitler was poised to strike and when Chamberlain indicated he had reached the limits of ‘peace at all costs,’ that Roosevelt decided to intervene.³⁰ On September 25, Carr telegraphed a plea from President Benes, in which the Czech president asked that Roosevelt urge the British and French not to abandon Czechoslovakia.³¹ The repercussions of such appeasement would not only be Czechoslovakia’s destruction, said Benes, but also a great conflict throughout the entire world. Whether Benes’s message had any import is up for debate, but the following day Roosevelt sent a letter to Hitler and Benes.³² In it, Roosevelt reminded his readers of how much was at stake: “The fabric of peace on the continent of Europe, if not throughout the rest of the world, is in immediate danger.” He spoke of “shattered”

would halt Hitler in the pursuit of his plans. This meant that any steps to deal with him short of suitable force would necessarily be of an appeasement nature and purely temporary...I feared lest too ardent steps by the President should throw us into the same appeasement camp with Chamberlain and sooner or later attract the same obloquy that Chamberlain received.”

²⁹ Jay Pierrepont Moffat, diplomatic journal, 1938, September 16, 1938, Jay Pierrepont Moffat Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, 1. Moffat shares that he and his colleagues, along with Hull, were of universal accord that Roosevelt should not make a statement. In their minds, such an action could have no good outcome: “...if we emphasized peace as the essential we might be accused of “selling the Czechs down the river.” On the other hand, if we should emphasize the importance of a just settlement and England went to war, she might later say that we had given advice in that otherwise she would have sold the Czech’s down the river and hence we had assumed a moral responsibility.”

³⁰ Historian Basil Rauch argues that the timing of Roosevelt’s message—that it directly followed Chamberlain’s rejection of the Godesberg demands—proves that Roosevelt supported a hard line against Hitler. “Roosevelt’s letter seconded the strongest stand against Hitler that Chamberlain made during the crisis,” writes Rauch. In this way, Rauch holds that Roosevelt never supported wholesale appeasement, especially the kind that came on September 30. Rauch, *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 75. Arnold Offner, historian and expert on U.S.-German relations during the 1930s, disagrees with Rauch, arguing that Roosevelt was perpetually inclined toward appeasement, even in months following Munich. See Arnold Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War: American Foreign Policy and World Politics, 1917-1941* (New York: Krieger, 1986), 126. Dallek takes the middle ground.

³¹ Carr to Hull, September 25, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 625. When giving Carr the message, Benes added that he could not think of asking Roosevelt to do anything more. Carr replied that while he would transmit the message to the department, he could not foresee what action Roosevelt would take.

³² Hull forwarded the same letter to Chamberlain and Daladier.

economies and “wrecked” social structures before extending the moral weight of the “130 millions of people of the United States” who earnestly desired a “peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement.”³³

Roosevelt’s specification that he and his country longed to see a peaceful and fair resolution to the crisis at hand was important to Benes. In his reply to the president, Benes expressed being “deeply moved” by the eleventh-hour message, believing that Roosevelt’s words could contribute to a “just solution.” He reiterated this point, sharing with Roosevelt his contention that the crisis could still be resolved in “a spirit of equity.”³⁴ Hitler was not so understanding, and the crisis plunged forward unabated.³⁵ On September 27, Roosevelt sent another message, this one to Mussolini and asking for speedy mediation. Again, it is unclear as to the significance of Roosevelt’s message, but two days later, the four leaders—Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini—met at Munich and ironed out the treaty.³⁶

³³ Roosevelt to Hitler, September 26, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 631. In another part of the letter, Roosevelt emphasized his country’s neutrality: “The United States has no political entanglements. It is caught in no mesh of hatred.” Later, he reiterated his call for a just solution by expressing his hopes that “reason and equity might prevail.”

³⁴ Benes to Roosevelt, September 26, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 639.

³⁵ In his reply to Roosevelt, Hitler agreed regarding the “unforeseeable consequences of European war.” He went on to absolve the German people of responsibility and offered one of his long, bitter diatribes against “the revolting Czechoslovakian regime of violence and bloodiest terror.” Hitler continued his indictment of the Prague government: “Countless dead, thousands of injured, ten thousands of persons arrested and imprisoned, desolated villages are the accusing witnesses...of the Prague Government.” Hitler to Roosevelt, September 27, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 643. Interestingly, the department cabled Carr that same day, asking for the minister to comment on Hitler’s accusations that thousands of Germans were dead, wounded, or detained at the hands of Benes’s government. Hull to Carr, September 27, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 645. Carr answered the department’s inquiry two days later with a substantive defense of Czechoslovakia. He began by saying that it was only because of the German press that the Sudeten dispute ever became an internal conflict, let alone a “menace to world peace.” Next, though a peaceful solution was in sight in late-summer, the Sudetenland’s radical leaders broke off negotiations. Carr laid blame for any “bloody terror” on the Sudeten Germans, as the Czechs had gone out of their way to avoid any provocation. “I have interviewed a neutral observer who relates frightful details and fully supported the conclusion that the conflicts in the Sudetenland have been conceived and directed by the Sudeten Germans.” In regard to the thousands of detained Germans, Carr estimated the number to be closer to 400. On the “desolated villages”—“generally untrue.” To round off the message, Carr reiterated one more time that if war were to come, responsibility for it “may be placed directly upon Hitler and his advisers.” Carr to Hull, September 28, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 668.

³⁶ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 166. Regarding the importance of Roosevelt’s plea to Mussolini, Dallek writes, “...whether this had more than a marginal impact alongside of other

On September 29, when the leaders of France, Britain, and Italy were still en route to Munich, Vladimir Hurban, the Czechoslovak minister in Washington, delivered a message to the State Department explaining that the Czechoslovak government had conceded to the majority of Hitler's demands. However, if further difficulties were to arise, it asked that the entire dispute be submitted to Roosevelt for arbitration, "which Czechoslovakia pledges its adherence to in advance."³⁷ A reply never came, and Hull explained in a press conference the following day that events had so changed that none was merited. Still, the last-minute plea to place the whole crisis at the feet of Roosevelt, however outlandish a request, demonstrates the faith and trust Prague placed in Washington, but also Washington's unwillingness to become entangled in Munich's mess.

As a result of working through the crisis together, the Schonborn staff had developed a close camaraderie at September's end. The fact that the legation was understaffed only fueled the legation's 'all hands on deck' environment.³⁸ Carr wrote to Hull expressing his delight for those with whom he served, personally extolling everyone from the consuls to the stenographers: "I feel certain that nowhere in the service is to be found a more conscientious, loyal, and capable staff than the group I have named."³⁹ It was into this tight-knit community at the Schonborn that George Kennan began his service in Prague. Arriving on the morning of Munich, Kennan reached the Schonborn's front doors to begin what would ultimately become a year of invaluable

considerations is doubtful. In short, Hitler and Mussolini probably viewed Roosevelt's appeals as gestures by a powerless man."

³⁷ Hurban to Hull, September 29, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 679.

³⁸ The Schonborn was also understaffed during the crisis. In early September, Carr interceded on behalf of Vinton Chapin, who was supposed to be transferred at that time. Beyond being a useful and competent secretary of the legation, Carr stressed the importance of Chapin's contacts and sources for information gathering and reporting. "His transfer at this time would increase my own responsibilities to an extent that is inconsistent with the interests of the Government or fairness to me in existing conditions." Carr also requested a new officer: "...Kennan, whom I know." Carr to Hull, for Messersmith, telegram no. 177, September 6, 1938, NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal File, Box 410, 123C.369/115.

³⁹ Carr to Hull, "No. 278," October 28, 1938, Carr Papers.

service in Czechoslovakia. In the years following his time in Czechoslovakia, Kennan would become an influential policymaker and household name, but upon his arrival in 1938, he was just a little-known secretary of the legation. After a year's time, Kennan would leave Czechoslovakia as the legation's most traveled and prolific reporter. Kennan authored or coauthored the vast majority of the paper trail transmitted from Prague to Washington, copiously detailing the ever-changing circumstances in post-Munich Czechoslovakia.

Kennan had entered the foreign service in the early 1920s. There, he developed a peculiar mix of love for classic Russia and deep suspicion and scorn for the Soviet state. In 1934 he helped establish the United States' first legation in Moscow, and he remained there until 1937 when he was called home. Like Carr, the turn in Kennan's career was at least partially the result of Roosevelt's shuffling of the department. The president did not appreciate the anti-Soviet outlook of both the legation in Moscow and the department in Washington, so when Kennan returned home he learned that he would be one of two officials manning the newly minted "Russia desk." After a miserable year working in Washington, Kennan requested a transfer overseas for him and his family, which came in summer 1938.⁴⁰

While working in D.C., Kennan kept a close eye on events in Central Europe. The Czechoslovak crisis was "simmering," and Kennan, always an astute follower of the day's geopolitics, did not want to miss the "climax" in Czechoslovakia.⁴¹ With poetic timing, the journey across the Atlantic was full of torrential rains and gales. Along the way the ship's passengers heard word of Godesberg, and later Chamberlain's news of the upcoming meeting at Munich. From Paris Kennan flew to Prague. When flying over Germany Kennan saw a line of

⁴⁰ For details of Kennan's life and career, see Kennan, *Memoirs* and John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

⁴¹ Kennan, "Memoirs Part II," 59.

military planes and wondered whether they would be taking off soon to bomb Prague. He arrived at the Schonborn palace in late-morning, September 29. It was a “lovely” September day, but more importantly “it was Prague’s day of destiny.”⁴²

On September 30, Kennan, Chapin, and others spent the morning ruminating on how the Czechs would respond to the supposed agreement. Prague’s government was in deliberation, but reports were coming from London about what had been decided by the four powers. In the afternoon following Munich, only rumors about the terms of the agreement had reached the Prague’s streets. By one p.m. on Friday, still only speculations of the agreement’s details trickled throughout Czechoslovakia, though citizens were waiting with “much anticipation.”⁴³ News correspondents worked feverishly from international hotels like “vultures,” and the people rushed to newsstands to gather whatever details were becoming available.⁴⁴ American officials were only a few hours ahead. At one in the afternoon, Carr telegraphed the department the basics of the agreement: 1) the progressive occupation of the first four zones by Germany by October 10; 2) the creation of an international commission to determine the final borders and plebiscites; 3) the inclusion of frontier guarantees from France and Britain immediately, and then later from Germany and Italy provided that Czechoslovakia’s border disputes with Poland and Hungary were satisfactorily settled.⁴⁵ Two hours later, the legation provided details of the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Carr to Hull, September 30, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/366.

⁴⁴ George Kennan, diary entry, September 29, 1938, Kennan Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 231. In regard to the correspondents, Kennan recorded that “their plight amused me. Here, like vultures, to profit by the mortal agony of a little country, they were supposed to be giving the world hot news right from the center of things. In actuality they were grouped around a borrowed radio in one of the hotel rooms, frantically trying to find out from a London broadcast what was taking place in the world.”

⁴⁵ Carr to Hull, September 30, 1938, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1342. Carr pointed out that at the time of sending the telegram, the Czechoslovak government was still in private deliberation. Prior to Carr’s message, ambassadors William Bullitt (Paris) and Joseph Kennedy (London) had cabled Hull, informing the department of the agreement’s general terms and the expectation that Czechoslovakia would accept. NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1340-41.

occupation zones and soon after informed Washington that while the Czech government had accepted Munich “with a heavy heart,” the people were still largely unaware of it, let alone the details.⁴⁶

America’s response to the Munich pact, at least on an official level, was one of relief. American officials serving in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and in other parts of Europe, reported happy responses on behalf of their host governments, but also themselves. In Washington, both the Roosevelt administration and the State Department breathed somewhat freely for the first time in weeks with a general war having been avoided. As tensions eased after the announcement of Munich, Jay Pierrepont Moffat, head of the State Department’s Division of Western European Affairs, noted that he and others in the department were prone to spending long periods at their desks, doing nothing but “ruminating over the events of the past crisis...wondering what might have been better.” He felt good about how the department handled the crisis: “The United States has come through with its cards well played and no mistakes chalked up against it.”⁴⁷ For an official response, Roosevelt tasked Welles with delivering the department’s thoughts on Munich to the public. Welles, along with Moffat, Hull, and others from the department worked together to strike the correct tone.⁴⁸ The statement, delivered on September 30, was necessarily muted: “...it is unnecessary to say that [the agreement] afford a universal sense of relief.”⁴⁹

At the Schonborn, Kennan, upon his arrival, found everyone relieved to know that war had been avoided. The American public greeted the news of Chamberlain’s ‘peace in our time’

⁴⁶ Carr to Hull, September 30, 1938, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1367; Carr to Hull, September 30, 1938, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1366. At 12:30 p.m. in Prague, foreign minister Krofta received the ministers from Britain, France, and Italy and informed them of Prague’s acceptance of the Munich terms. See Theodor Prochazka, *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia, October 1938-March 1939* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981), 9-12.

⁴⁷ Moffat, diplomatic journal, October 1-2, 1938, 1. In March, Moffat would offer some criticisms for Carr’s handling the crisis, but in regard to Munich, he was pleased with the legation’s work.

⁴⁸ Moffat, diplomatic journal, October 1-2, 1938, 3.

⁴⁹ “Statement Issued by the Department of State,” September 30, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 683.

with enthusiasm, and remained grateful that, even in September's darkest days, their country kept aloof from the European imbroglio.⁵⁰ Only correspondents from particular newspapers and academics of certain fields chided the agreement reached at Munich. To them, the last bastion of democracy in central Europe had been utterly sold out, and the fascists had won the day. Dorothy Thompson, a *Washington Post* correspondent and leading advocate of internationalist, pro-refugee policies, cabled Hull directly on September 30, begging the secretary to formally protest the agreement. "The agreement is in no sense a diplomatic document and any jurist could tear it to shreds," wrote Thompson.⁵¹

Despite their sincere relief that war had been avoided on September 30, few in the department saw any lasting peace in Munich.⁵² There were some officials, such as Hugh Wilson, ambassador to Germany, and Joseph Kennedy, ambassador to Britain, who believed that Munich would usher in a new era of "peace and prosperity." Most, however, were not so confident. Within days, Roosevelt and Hull realized that Munich only delayed an inevitable conflict, and it was difficult to say whether the price of Munich was worth the cost. Even those officials more inclined toward harbor sympathy for the difficult positions of France and England, such as William Bullitt, ambassador to France, were appalled by Munich's terms. Bullitt himself had long argued that the United States was in no position to criticize London and Paris when she herself refused to fight.⁵³ However, when he learned of Hitler's Godesberg demands, he found

⁵⁰ Populations throughout Europe were overjoyed by the news of Munich as well. Even German citizens saw Chamberlain as the savior of the dire situation, which inadvertently exasperated Hitler's dissatisfaction with the treaty.

⁵¹ Thompson to Hull, NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 28, 760F.62. Thompson went on to say that the treaty in no way provided for the protection of the Czechoslovak people—"their lives, their properties, or their existences"—from a German occupation. It was not just a coup against the Czechoslovak state, but "all of us."

⁵² Hull, *Memoirs*, 595-596.

⁵³ "I believe that all members of our Government and officials of the different Departments should refrain from any expression of opinion whatsoever tending to make it appear that we believe that France should go to war in order to keep 3,200,000 Sudetens under the rule of 7,000,000 Czechs. It is entirely honorable to urge another nation to go to war if one is prepared to go to war at once on the side of that nation but I know nothing more dishonorable

them “totally unacceptable.” When speaking with the British ambassador in Paris, he had let it be known that no Government could ever accept such a proposal with good conscience.⁵⁴ Those at the Schonborn, too, though grateful for no bombings and invasions, felt terribly for the Czechoslovaks. Carr had made it clear to the department that fault for the Munich crisis lay entirely with the Germans and Hitler—to see the Germans essentially rewarded for their miserable behavior brought comfort to no one at the Schonborn.

Naturally it was a rainy evening, but amidst the depressing atmosphere, Carr was taken by the “marvelous self-control” and “superb loyalty” demonstrated by the Czechoslovak people.⁵⁵ So much so, in fact, that despite the troubling future that lay ahead of the Czechoslovaks, Carr did not foresee any serious trouble.⁵⁶ At five in the evening, General Jan Syrový, Czechoslovakia’s Prime Minister, announced the Munich *diktat* to the people.⁵⁷ The miserable news emitted from the city’s loudspeakers, falling with a great thud on a populace that, up to that point, had been ready for and expecting a fight.⁵⁸ “It was a nation in bereavement but momentarily numbed by the magnitude of the situation,” said Carr in a dispatch to the department.⁵⁹ Carr, Kennan, Chapin, and others from the embassy spent the evening visiting

than to urge another nation to go to war if one is determined not to go to war on the side of that nation, and I believe that the people of the United States are determined not to go to war against Germany.” Bullitt to Hull, September 19, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 592.

⁵⁴ Bullitt to Hull, September 25, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 624.

⁵⁵ Undated diary entry, “Diaries, 1937-1942,” Box 6, Carr Papers.

⁵⁶ Carr to Hull, October 1, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1400.

⁵⁷ On September 22, and in response to great amounts of public pressure, Benes dismissed Prime Minister Milan Hodza and his cabinet, replacing him with General Syrový. Syrový possessed an impressive career of military service, including leadership over the infamous Czech legionnaires.

⁵⁸ Carr to Hull, “No. 277: From Munich to Nurnberg to Munich,” October 20, 1938, 23, Box 14, Carr Papers. Above all, the Czechoslovak army was prepared to fight. On September 29, Carr telegraphed the department reporting that the general belief among Czech military circles was that Czechoslovakia would have to fight at some point, and that they were as prepared as they ever would be. According to Carr, the army, as of September 29, believed it would be able to stave off the Germans for multiple months. Carr to Hull, September 29, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1320.

⁵⁹ Carr to Hull, “No. 277: From Munich to Nurnberg to Munich,” October 20, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 23.

different parts of the city in an effort to observe the response. They expected at least some demonstrations and riotous frustration, but mostly what they saw were “sad faces” and all they heard were the “low tones” of dispirited conversation. At General Syrový’s request, people retired to their homes early, being warned that indulging the urge to fight back would only make matters worse.⁶⁰ There was the expressed belief that any major incident of protest, no matter its nature, could result in Berlin determining that a full occupation would be necessary.⁶¹ Due to the ongoing blackout, people were already disposed to stay home. The city’s bereavement was perhaps most clearly demonstrated when the embassy staff walked to the Charles Bridge that evening. Usually bustling and lively on a Friday night, the bridge was all but empty, and the Americans mused that “the life of the city had died out.”⁶²

So ended September. And as harsh of a month as it had been for Czechoslovakia, October would prove in many ways to be worse. For the time being, though, Carr saw a number of positives. First and foremost, war had been avoided. And despite the miserable pill they were forced to swallow, Carr could not help but inform the department of the “marvelous self control” and “superb loyalty” demonstrated by the Czech people, something he would continue to say for the remainder of his tenure in Prague. Even though difficult times lay ahead, he did not see any serious trouble in the near future due to Prague’s impressive calm.⁶³ Kennan too was at least partially optimistic. While acknowledging the bitter result of being abandoned by an “unjust and unsympathetic Europe,” Munich kept the heart of the country intact and its young, industrious

⁶⁰ Carr, undated diary entry, “Diaries, 1937-1942,” Box 6, Carr Papers. In the days following Munich, Czech historian Hubert Ripka recorded that “Immediately after the announcement of the capitulation, attempts were made to organize public demonstrations in Prague, but the public were too ready to respond to the appeal made by the authorities for calmness and discipline. Everyone wanted to be alone with his grief and with the burning torture of his frustrated hopes.” See Hubert Ripka, *Munich Before and After*, trans. Ida Šindelková (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1969), 235-236.

⁶¹ Carr to Hull, October 6, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1504.

⁶² Carr to Hull, September 30, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/366, RG 59.

⁶³ Carr to Hull, October 1, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1400.

generations alive.⁶⁴ In the coming month, however, both Carr and Kennan would see their notes of promise largely snuffed out as the Munich pact was implemented.

The event that first shocked a broad swath of American observers, the one that for many took the wind out of Munich's sails, was the Czech-Polish dispute over Teschen. The rift, like most others during this time, dated back to the aftermath of World War I when, soon after coming into existence, both countries laid claim to the region. Teschen itself was a square-shaped industrial center in Silesia. Roughly 800 square miles (about two-thirds the size of Rhode Island), it was located at the nexus of Moravia, Slovakia, Poland, and Germany, making it highly contestable, at least geographically. Adding to the difficulties, both countries offered valid arguments for possessing at least parts of Teschen, and the issue eventually came before a special Versailles commission.⁶⁵ The powers that be divided the region almost evenly, with Czechoslovakia receiving the greater share, as well as the best of Teschen's rich coal mines.⁶⁶ It was an important victory for Prague, as Teschen quickly became a crucial communications and transportation link between the country's western (Bohemia-Moravia) and eastern (Slovakia and Ruthenia) provinces.

Josef Beck, Poland's foreign minister during the Czech-German crises, was serious about getting the whole of Teschen, a goal that Polish public opinion ardently supported. As the Munich crisis turned especially grim in late-September, Beck sent notes to Kamil Krofta, Beck's counterpart in Prague, asking that the Teschen issue be addressed. According to Kennan and the American legation, the talks between Warsaw and Prague up to that point had been "radical" but

⁶⁴ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ Felix Buttin, "The Polish-Czechoslovak Conflict over Teschen Silesia (1918-1920): A Case Study," *Perspectives* no. 25 (2005): 63-78. The United States did not participate in the commission, but Buttin notes that Wilson "was more favorable for the Poles than the Czechs."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

“correct” in diplomatic tone.⁶⁷ Krofta and the Czechoslovak government responded optimistically, assuring Beck that the situation would be handled, but that the talks must be unhurried. In the midst of dealing with Godesberg and mobilization, Prague already had its hands full.

Anthony Biddle, the American ambassador to Poland, feared the Polish-Czech dispute might lead to armed conflict. On September 30, he messaged the department, asking that Roosevelt suggest a conference to settle issues between the powers not present at Munich, namely Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. It was a longshot, but, according to Biddle, “all signs here point to this being a question of hours and not days.”⁶⁸ Roosevelt and the department wanted nothing to do with Teschen, noting that Czechoslovak-Polish and Czechoslovak-Hungarian disputes fell within Munich’s terms. Hull, on behalf of Roosevelt, did ask Biddle to give Beck the “friendly” message that he, Roosevelt, “trusts that the Polish Government will contribute to peace in Europe at this time by avoiding an armed clash and by solving the existing difficulty through pacific negotiation.”⁶⁹

Beck found Krofta’s assurances woefully unsatisfactory, and on September 30, five minutes to midnight, Prague received an ultimatum from Warsaw, demanding that it concede a Polish occupation of Teschen by noon of next day.⁷⁰ From Beck’s point-of-view, by agreeing to

⁶⁷ “Enclosure No. 1 to Dispatch No. 265,” October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Vol. 68, 1-3.

⁶⁸ Biddle to Hull, September 30, 1938, five p.m., *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 688. Beck actually invited Biddle, along with the ambassadors of Britain, Rumania, and France, to confer with him about the Teschen dispute.

⁶⁹ Hull to Biddle, September 30, 1938, seven p.m., *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 689.

⁷⁰ According to a report drafted by the U.S. legation on October 3, Poland first approached Czechoslovakia regarding the transfer of the Teschen region on September 21. On the 25th, Prague replied, expressing concerns over Poland’s justification for such action, but nonetheless expressed a desire to see a peaceful solution. On the 27th, Poland stressed its demand for the immediate occupation of areas with a Polish majority and plebiscites for disputed regions. In a note given to the Poles on September 30, Foreign Minister Krofta agreed to the territorial concessions, but asked that the transfer be worked out in an “unhurried” manner so that Prague could first settle the Munich delimitations. Krofta added that a commission could be established to settle the details of the Teschen transfer. Later that day, Warsaw rejected Krofta’s note outright and demanded immediate action based on the September 27 note. “Enclosure No. 1 to Dispatch No. 265,” October 3, 1938, 1-3, NARA, RG 84, Vol. 68.

⁷⁰ Undated diary entry, “Diaries, 1937-1942,” October 1938, Box 6, Carr Papers.

Munich, Prague legitimized the notion that its minority problems needed to be dealt with, and that included the Polish minority. Upset that Poland had been excluded from the Munich proceedings and eager to act independently and forcefully, Beck sent the ultimatum with every intention of seizing Teschen immediately.⁷¹ Utterly overwhelmed, and with no means to defend Teschen from a Polish invasion, Prague accepted Warsaw's demands on October 1.

The U.S. legation in Prague found Poland's behavior during the dispute entirely despicable. To them, the Poles, "brother-Slavs" of the Czechs, had played a ruthless, opportunistic game that did nothing but beat an already beaten people. Carr, in a long dispatch detailing the dispute, called Beck's ultimatum "a brutal and indecent note as I have ever read." Kennan—who probably more than any other in the Schonborn understood the region's history of complex, contested borders—did not hold back his disdain when relaying what happened to Washington: "the Polish Government suddenly presented in Prague a note which for its offensive tone and for its cynical exploitation of the misfortunes of a friendly neighboring state can have had few parallels in modern history." Given the mostly cold manner in which Prague and Warsaw treated one another in the time between Versailles and Munich, Kennan's allusion to "friendly neighboring" relations can only be understood as a reference to Prague's desire to achieve a peaceful concession of Teschen prior to the ultimatum.⁷²

In their report, Carr and Kennan explained the helplessness of the Czech government in the face of Poland's ultimatum. The Czechs had little defensive fortifications in Teschen, and

⁷¹ Beck was especially upset that Poland's demands for the Teschen minority were included in the addenda to the Munich agreement, and that it was equated with Hungary's territory claims, both being treated as secondary. *Gazeta Polska*, the country's official outlet, declared: "The return of Teschen Silesia can only be realized by Poland herself. No one was authorized to speak on Poland's behalf." Jerzy Szapiro, "Poles Ready to Act," *New York Times*, October 1, 1938, 1.

⁷² Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Czech-Polish relations, though strained by the Teschen dispute, did have one major area of solidarity: mutual fear of Germany. However, in 1934 Poland signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, and in the following year Czechoslovakia entered into a defensive pact with the Soviet Union. From that point going forward Czech-Polish relations were increasingly at odds.

even if they had, the Czech army was in no position to defend against a Polish invasion. The army was in the process of demobilizing from the German threat, and German troops were pouring into Teschen's surrounding areas. Krofta worried that a messy fight with the Poles would give the Germans pretext to penetrate further into Czechoslovak territory. Thus, there was no option but to capitulate, which, according to the American legation, the Czechoslovaks did with "remarkable dignity and restraint."⁷³

Carr's and Kennan's reactions to the Teschen ultimatum were colored by the fact that they personally knew the individuals involved, especially foreign minister Krofta. Biddle saw Warsaw's behavior with a greater measure of sympathy, viewing Czechoslovakia's replies as obvious attempts to procrastinate. He reported to Hull that the Polish government considered Prague's handling of the matter as typical "Benesison" behavior.⁷⁴ Back in Washington, department officials, like those in Prague, found Poland's actions egregious, but being so far from the issue, they had a more tempered outlook. Cordell Hull, in a conversation with the Polish minister in Washington, doubted the minister's claim that Poland emerged from the affair with increased prestige, but the subject was quickly buried beneath more pressing issues.⁷⁵ Moffat, known within the foreign service for his straightforward fair-mindedness, did not relish seeing Czechoslovakia so brutally kicked while she was down, but on the other hand it was not unlike what she had done to Poland in 1920.⁷⁶ News outlets, already critical of the "betrayal"

⁷³ Carr to Hull, "No. 265," October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 84, 800-Czechoslovakia, Vol. 68, 1-4.

⁷⁴ Biddle was not wholly unsympathetic to Czechoslovakia, but he worried that Prague's failure to concede Polish demands would lead to further conflict that would only favor Hitler. Biddle was adamant that quick acceptance on Prague's part, though a sacrifice, would best serve the democracies in the long run.

⁷⁵ Hull, *Memoirs*, 596.

⁷⁶ In 1920, while the Polish army fought off Russian revolutionaries who were closing in on Warsaw, the Czechoslovak military occupied its claims to Teschen, giving Prague the upper hand during the subsequent special commission.

committed by the democracies, by and large reported the Teschen transfer in a negative light—the first consequence of failure at Munich.

The Czech-Polish crisis passed by swiftly. Interestingly, the Czechoslovak minister in Washington, Vladimir Hurban, telephoned the department at two a.m. during the height of the crisis. After asking to speak to the secretary of state, the operator informed Hurban that neither the secretary of state nor anyone else was present at the office. “That is funny,” replied Hurban, “I thought they would all be here now.”⁷⁷ A few days later, at a party on October 2, Hurban took Moffat aside and spoke with the “utmost bitterness.” Moffat felt for the minister, acknowledging that “his country was abandoned by its friends and left to make the burden of the sacrifice to Germany alone.” Still, thought Moffat, “his emotions were not well under control and he made some remarks which in a calmer moment he will probably regret having given voice to.”⁷⁸

The government in Prague, upset over Poland’s taking advantage of her embattled circumstances, appealed to the United States through a diplomatic note. Prague explained that Warsaw’s seizure of Teschen violated both the Kellogg-Briand and Munich pacts itself, giving the Munich delimitations an arbitrary posture.⁷⁹ It is unclear as to what Prague expected to come of the note, as the United States had made its position of aloofness quite clear in its official response to Munich. The Teschen affair was in France and Britain’s jurisdiction, and both countries had condemned Poland’s behavior via the international commission.⁸⁰ Of course, this came after Bonnet and Halifax had pressured Prague to give in to Beck’s ultimatum.⁸¹ On October 2, Polish troops occupied the city of Teschen. According to Carr, the Poles’ “drastic

⁷⁷ Pierrepont Moffat, untitled memorandum, October 1, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760C.60F/287.

⁷⁸ Moffat, diplomatic journal, October 1-2, 1938, 4.

⁷⁹ Hurban to Hull, October 1, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 691; Czechoslovak legation to Hull, October 1, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Vol. 68. In regard to how Poland’s demands violated the Munich pact, the Czechoslovak legation pointed to paragraph two of the addenda.

⁸⁰ NARA, RG 59, 760C.64

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

methods” procured the “utmost bitterness of the Czechs.”⁸² Talks dragged into late October, and Polish demands crept dangerously close to the important city of Mostravska Ostrava, where the Germans had already encroached upon on the other side. Not wanting to lose the city, and having “gotten beyond sentimentality,” the Czechs countered by offering Poland a region with zero Polish population. The Czechs did not anticipate the Polish government being “disturbed” by this fact.⁸³ On October 14, Czechoslovakia agreed to cede a region around Teschen with 126,000 Czechs and 76,000 Poles. Poland then demanded another region which had 115,000 Czechs and a little over 1,000 Poles.⁸⁴

“The ruthless action of the Polish Government,” wrote Kennan, had dashed the modest hopes surrounding Munich, and the Teschen controversy had made a “profound and deplorable” impression on the Czechoslovak people. In the words of Krofta, the whole affair was like a knife thrust in the back.⁸⁵ Unfortunately for Prague, there were more knives to come. During the same time that the Teschen dispute was startling American observers, the Czech-Sudeten border was being redefined according to Munich’s terms. And like Teschen, by the time the new Czech-Sudeten border was determined, those at the Schonborn held out little hope for lasting peace. As stipulated in the agreement, the first four zones of the Sudetenland were to be occupied by the German army in the period October 1-7. These four zones constituted areas of clear German majorities and Czechoslovakia’s major defensive fortifications.

The delimitations of the ‘fifth zone’ were to be decided by an international commission, consisting of representatives from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and—shockingly so—Czechoslovakia. Taking place in Berlin, the commission began its work at five p.m. on

⁸² Carr to Hull, October 2, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1415.

⁸³ Carr to Hull, October 21, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.64/169.

⁸⁴ Carr to Hull, October 14, 1938, NARA, 760F.64/150, RG 59.

⁸⁵ Carr to Hull, “No. 265,” October 3, 1-4, 1938, NARA, 800 Czechoslovakia, RG 84, Vol. 68.

September 29, before Czechoslovakia's representatives had even arrived.⁸⁶ Sub-committees were quickly established, each focusing on the technical issues of occupation, delimitation, and plebiscites. From the onset, Carr was extremely concerned about the ongoing delimitations of the 'fifth zone,' particularly for how the Czechoslovak people would respond. In early October, the American legation informed Washington on a number of occasions how the public, even those living in Prague, were largely unaware of Munich's details. During the afternoon of September 29, hours after the Benes government capitulated, only rumors and guesses bounced around the capital. In less populated parts of the country citizens knew even less. When the official announcement came that evening, and soon after the map showing the first four zones, it was easy for the people to misjudge just how damaging Munich would be.⁸⁷ As Carr noted, the first four zones, as depicted on the official map, showed relatively small areas of the Sudetenland bordered out with straight, black lines. The straight lines did nothing to convey the weaving, irregular, and extensive boundaries to come, but simply showed the general areas to be occupied at once. Carr worried that the people might fool themselves into thinking that the first four zones were the worst of it. The people were already crushed by the news of Munich, as they had been ready for and expecting a fight. Surrender and abandonment had destroyed the country's morale. How would they handle the brutal realities of the 'fifth zone'?

On October 3, Carr rattled off a quick telegram to the department highlighting this concern: "The people of Czechoslovakia do not realize how close to Prague the Munich agreement may permit Germany to penetrate...through the decisions of the International Commission now sitting in Berlin."⁸⁸ True to Carr's concerns, Germany's representatives, led by

⁸⁶ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 63.

⁸⁷ Carr to Hull, October 7, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1564

⁸⁸ Carr to Hull, October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1528.

the indomitable Ernst von Weizsaker, controlled the commission's proceedings from the start. So much so, in fact, that even Hugh Wilson, U.S. ambassador to Berlin and oft German apologist, admitted that the Germans would likely get whatever they demanded.⁸⁹ Unfortunately for Prague, they demanded a lot. Germany's expectations for the 'fifth zone' mirrored the demands made at Godesberg, demands which at the time had drawn definitive rejections from Britain and France, and demands for which Prague was willing to fight against. In addition, Germany pressed for the 1910 Austrian census to be the basis of population counts, a decision that would overwhelmingly benefit the German cause. The Czechoslovaks pushed back and the commission reached a deadlock on October 4.

Incensed by the stalled discussions, Hitler threatened the democracies, letting it be known that the commission would either affirm Germany's proposals or the Wehrmacht would occupy the territory shown in the Godesberg map immediately. In an effort to buy time or earn good grace, the Czechoslovak commission informed Hitler that Benes was to announce his resignation in the coming days. This happened the following day, October 5. Far from being forced out, Benes understood soon after capitulating at Munich that neither Hitler nor his own people would be willing to tolerate his leadership any longer. The American legation, too, had expected the Benes resignation. According to Carr, once Czechoslovak officials realized the crippling nature of Munich, it was known that someone's "head would be demanded" by the people. In its report to Washington on the resignation, the legation cited how Benes's foreign policy had proven injurious, and that the president enjoyed little popularity among the people, paling in comparison

⁸⁹ Wilson to Hull, October 6, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1499. A major point of contention was determining what census would be used for determining ethnic populations. The Germans wanted the 1910 Austrian census, while the Czechs expected the census of 1920. Wilson anticipated that the Germans would get their way, which they did.

to his predecessor, Masaryk.⁹⁰ In Carr's words, Benes's handling of the crisis had proven "disastrous."⁹¹

Even so, Benes's resignation did not provide tangible comfort the country's citizens, but rather, according to the American legation, caused "a further feeling of agony." In the eyes of the people, Benes may have been terribly unsuccessful, but he pursued his course with morality and loyalty.⁹² Likewise, Benes's departure did little to appease Hitler, who dialed up his pressure on the commission to accept Germany's territorial claims and the 1910 census. Despite rejecting similar demands at Godesberg, this time around Britain and France were unwilling to derail any semblance of peace, and the two democracies conceded to Germany's position.

Czechoslovakia's representatives were powerless. It was either accept the *ditkat* or invite Germany's wrath over the remainder of the country. Though final details of the border still needed working out, the essence of the 'fifth zone' was set.

On October 6, Carr cabled Washington, explaining that all the news he had heard about the international commission suggested that decisions were "going badly against [Czechoslovakia]." This was confirmed the next day when the commission agreed upon the general limits of the 'fifth zone.' In a substantial telegram to the department, the American legation stressed the devastating borders it imposed upon the Czechoslovaks. Carr was clear that the four powers "forced" the terms upon the Czechs, a sort of reprise from the previous week. In running through the details, Carr presented an especially bleak picture of Prague's newfound borders. Every large city would now lie in close proximity to the German border. All major railways had been cut or lost. Most fortifications were now in German hands and many of its

⁹⁰ Carr to Hull, October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 860F.00/560.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Carr to Hull, October 6, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1504.

industries as well. What seemed to bother Carr most was the fact that the ‘fifth zone’ was essentially the same as Hitler’s Godesberg demands, and in most areas by which it differed, it was to the German’s benefit. It was a harsh result to say the least, but the government in Prague intended to move forward and consolidate within its new boundaries. Carr, however, was not so hopeful: “the new frontiers dictated by [Hitler] at Berlin indicate no intention on his part to permit what remains of Czechoslovakia to continue to prosper as an independent state.”

Germany’s resounding victories through the international commission did not go unnoticed at home. Correspondents called it “renewed Anglo-French betrayal,” and took the commission to task for offering carte blanche for further occupations. One correspondent pointed out the sad irony of the Czechs abandoning their “normally realistic” disposition for efforts of appeasement, whether it be sending representatives to Berlin or the wholesale resignations of Benes and his confidants.⁹³

The United States was not able to sit entirely aloof from Czechoslovakia’s delimitation nightmare. As the decisions of the international commission trickled out, the government in Prague, essentially helpless in the face of Anglo-French-German pressure, fretted over losing key territories. Areas of industry were important, but they most feared losing railways and transportation hubs. Czechoslovakia had a limited number of railways connecting its western and eastern provinces, and it had already lost a significant amount of track through the Teschen transfer. With the Slovaks and Ruthenians dialing up their autonomy movements, Prague feared that greater losses of railroad track could lead to an untenable political situation. With these fears in mind, Krofta contacted Carr on October 3, inquiring whether the United States might pose

⁹³ G.E.R. Gedye, “New ‘Betrayal’ Charged,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1938, 12. On October 4, the Prague government sent two officials to announce Benes’s coming resignation in the hopes that it would have a conciliatory effect.

demarches to Berlin, Rome, Paris, and London, pressing each nation's representatives to give careful consideration to Czechoslovakia's frontier needs, particularly its desire to retain Böhmisches Trübau and Zwittau, two towns necessary to secure a main railway that connected Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia.⁹⁴ Carr, who liked and respected Krofta, acknowledged Krofta's plea that day, assuring the foreign minister that he would contact the State Department straight away, although he knew that the department would not get involved.

On October 5, Carr wrote to Krofta, explaining that the United States "greatly regrets" not being able to be of assistance, but since the United States played no part in drawing up the Munich Agreement, it could not appropriately intervene in the commission's work.⁹⁵ This was all true "despite a desire on its part to give favorable consideration to any request received from the Czechoslovak Government." Trubau and Zwittau ultimately went to the Germans, and as if to highlight the rapidity of the events taking place, Krofta, who had resigned with Benes, was no longer the foreign minister by the time the department's response was received in Prague.

Within a week of Munich, the Americans serving in Prague viewed the agreement as hollow. On October 10, Edward Lawson, the American commercial attaché in Prague, submitted a report on the consequences of the new borders. In addition to losing incredible amounts of its industrial potential, Lawson explained that Czechoslovakia might face "strangulation" due to its crippled transportation lines.⁹⁶ Beyond such, Czechoslovakia lost control of its transportation routes along the Elbe River. On October 20, the legation's own research found that the Germans occupied ten predominantly Czech towns with major railroad centers, with some towns being 40-to-1 Czech. In Česká Trebová, the Germans occupied *only* the railway. In other places, the

⁹⁴ Carr to Hull, October 3, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 694.

⁹⁵ Welles to Carr, October 4, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, General, Vol. I, 695.

⁹⁶ Lawson to Carr, October 10, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 800-Czechoslovakia, 3.

Germans occupied towns for their industries and factories, despite clear Czech majorities.⁹⁷ In Policka, for example, the Germans took ownership despite there being 5,891 Czechs to 149 Germans. These unfortunate decisions by the International Commission did not just result in net economic losses for Czechoslovakia but produced a large swath of economic refugees. That is, some Czechoslovaks still lived in the truncated state while the places where they worked went to the Germans.⁹⁸

Members of the American legation did extensive reporting from the Sudeten region throughout October. Their reports paint an interesting picture. On the whole, the Sudeten transfer was carried out without any terrible complications or violence. On the other hand, though, the Sudeten frontiers were sites of constant confusion, skirmishes, and “incidents.” Sudeten Czechs, anti-Nazi Germans, and especially Jews found themselves in limbo, being sent back and forth with neither Prague nor Berlin wanting to take responsibility. Towns along the border squabbled over where exactly the demarcation line fell. Sudeten Germans complained that the Czechs were treating them poorly, while Sudeten Czechs spoke of the injustices suffered at the mercy of their new, German overlords. When German troops occupied the Jilemice district, the Czech officers protested, arguing that they had exceeded the demarcation line; the Germans read the map differently. Wanting to settle the matter, the Czechs tried to get in contact with the International Commission but could not locate its whereabouts. German overreach appeared constant, as the legation received a report that 87 communities in northern Moravia with a purely Czech

⁹⁷ Hejno, “Information about the number of refugees,” October 18, 1938, NARA, RG 84, 800, Vol. 67.

⁹⁸ Ibid. The Germans also occupied places of Czechoslovak historical significance despite Czech majorities. For instance, the Germans occupied Hodoslavice, the birthplace of František Palacký, the preeminent leader of the Czechoslovakia’s 19th century nationalist movement. Per the legation’s report, the town had 1,943 Czechs and one German.

population had been occupied by the Germans.⁹⁹ To make matters worse, frontier town leaders, undoubtedly imbued with a sense of self-importance, took it upon themselves to visit German and Hungarian delegations, begging for their districts to be occupied. Hungarians in Czechoslovakia staged little attacks on Slovak cities. In mid-October, Lawson reported that a group of fifty-or-so excited Hungarians attempted an attack on Uzhorod before fleeing across the border, while another group ransacked a Czech customs house.¹⁰⁰

To Carr and the embassy staff, the situation for Czechs and anti-Nazi Germans in the now annexed Sudetenland appeared grim. Some weeks earlier, Carr spoke with a group of American and British newspapermen coming from Vienna, who described the brutal behavior of the Austrian Nazis. Austrians, and especially Jews, suffered lootings and even shootings. The German army made little effort to prevent such “appalling” actions.¹⁰¹ Back in Washington, Hurban worked to combat the crisis through American channels. Though it was a difficult pill to swallow, Hurban recognized that the United States government could play no role in softening the blow of Munich. Hull had made it clear that the State Department, being of no party to the pact, could not even think of interjecting itself into the commission’s proceedings. Still, Hurban hoped that the Czechs and Slovaks living in the United States, and potentially the public at large, could provide humanitarian help. On October 3, Hurban approached Moffat about releasing a statement to the American public calling for those concerned to stand with and support Czechoslovakia.¹⁰² Moffat, who could not help but note Hurban’s bitterness and emotional strain, brought the request to Hull. The ever-cautious Hull replied that inasmuch as the message

⁹⁹ Hanácky Národohospodársky Sbor to American legation, October 25, 1938, NARA, RG 84, 800 Czechoslovakia, Vol. 68. According to the report, German soldiers were “astonished” that while occupying these communities, not one citizen could speak to them in German.

¹⁰⁰ “Report on the Situation,” October 15-17, 1938, NARA, RG 84, 800 Czechoslovakia, Vol. 68.

¹⁰¹ Carr, undated diary entry, “Diaries, 1937-1942,” 1938, Box 6, Carr Papers.

¹⁰² Jay Pierrepont Moffat, “Memorandum,” October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1523; Moffat, diplomatic journal, October 1-2, 1938, 4-5.

contained nothing that would embarrass the United States, he would prefer to neither endorse or reject the minister's request.¹⁰³ The following day, the *New York Times* reported Hurban's call for refugee aid.¹⁰⁴

As the government in Prague dealt with the blows of German and Polish occupation, it faced a third bout of demands from Hungary. This, however, came as no surprise. Hungary and Czechoslovakia had maintained sour relations since Versailles, when Czechoslovakia came into existence, partially at the expense of Hungary. Both Slovakia and Ruthenia had previously existed in Hungary's sphere of influence, and Budapest was eager to reacquire those lands. Budapest became a locus of revisionist pressure, forever at odds with Benes's efforts to see the Versailles treaty defended. However, due to its weak army and lack of support from the Rome-Berlin axis, Budapest, unlike Warsaw, could only watch as the four powers placed its demands in Munich's addenda. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Benes, while serving as foreign minister, vented and fumed to all who would listen about Hungary's dangerous revisionist talk. Many did in fact look warily upon Budapest's vitriolic attacks on the territorial decisions made at Versailles. Far fewer, though, could deny outright Hungary's demand that the 750,000 Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia be given self-determination. Of course, Budapest's desires always extended beyond Czechoslovakia's Magyar minority, as they longed for a common frontier with Poland.

Howard Travers, secretary of legation at Budapest, reported on the evening of Munich that Hungary, though pleased that peace had been settled, also hoped that it would be just as "jubilant" in three months' time.¹⁰⁵ On October 2, Carr reported a conversation with the

¹⁰³ Moffat, "Memorandum," October 3, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1523.

¹⁰⁴ "Czech Envoy Here Seeks Refugee Aid," *New York Times*, October 4, 1938, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Travers to Hull, September 30, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/369.

Hungarian minister in Prague, who remained vague about Budapest's plans. Krofta, worried that Slovakia's flakey allegiance would steer the region into the Hungarian sphere, proposed that a commission of experts between the two nations discuss the entirety of the minority question in an unhurried fashion.¹⁰⁶ Bonnet sympathized with the Hungary's demand for a settlement based on the terms of Munich and offered to press the Czechs to concede.¹⁰⁷

On October 3, the Hungarian minister handed a note demanding territorial revisions from the Czechoslovak state.¹⁰⁸ Hungary stipulated that it "invites" Czechoslovakia to, among other things, transfer to Hungary as a symbol of cession two or three Czech villages to the frontier. Hungary also desired for the settlement conference to occur by October 6. In speaking to Carr, Franticek Chvalkovsky, Czechoslovakia's new foreign minister, shared that because the country was facing pressure from so many sides, the Czechs would have to concede, though they would push to have the negotiations delayed until mid-October. Overall, Chalkovsky stressed the "relative friendliness" of the conversations with Hungary.¹⁰⁹ By October 14, however, any friendliness between Prague and Budapest wore off. Hungary, angered that the Slovak representatives refused to cede territories such as Nitra and Bratislava, broke off the negotiations. The two countries eventually agreed to put the dispute before Italy and Germany, and the final settlement would not come until early November.¹¹⁰ Throughout the remainder of October,

¹⁰⁶ Carr to Hull, October 2, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1415. In regard to Slovakia, reports from the legations indicated that Slovakia itself did not know what it wanted. For instance, on October 5, Hugh Wilson—ambassador to Germany—reported that in the aftermath of Munich, Germany had received four messages from four different Slovak groups asking for four different things. Wilson to Hull, October 5, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1495.

¹⁰⁷ Bullitt to Hull, October 4, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.64/128.

¹⁰⁸ Carr to Hull, "No. 284," October 31, 1938, Box 14, Carr Papers, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Carr to Hull, October 4, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.64/132.

¹¹⁰ Carr to Hull, October 14, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.64/150.

Hungary maintained an “intensive” propaganda campaign on the border through radio, air-dropped literature, “agitators,” and armed parties.¹¹¹

While dealing with the territorial concession to Poland and Germany, as well as the resignation of Benes, Prague also faced calls for greater autonomy from Slovakia and Ruthenia. The two regions had long histories of autonomy movements, and the mayhem of October’s early days catalyzed these talks. Taking advantage of the deep unrest inflicting the Czechoslovak state, Slovakia’s autonomy movement pressed Prague for concessions straight away. At a conference held in Zlinia on October 6, Slovak leaders declared their province’s autonomy, while also deciding to “cast their lot with the Czechs,” preferring to remain within a federated state.¹¹² This came as a disappointment to the Hungarians and the Poles, who desperately wanted a shared border.¹¹³ The autonomy granted to Slovakia was to be carried out progressively, and its main features saw Slovak become the region’s national language, and the establishment of a Slovak Diet and a Provincial Government to handle Slovakia’s internal matters. By October 8, a Slovak cabinet was established with Josef Tiso assuming the role of Premier.

As October drew to a close, it was not just the legation in Prague which viewed Munich as no lasting peace. On October 26, in a radio address, Roosevelt delivered a powerful, if not totally specific, denouncement of Hitlerism. After alluding to how the Munich crisis had proven that most of the world longed for peace, Roosevelt warned that “there can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.” Later, and calling to mind the desperate refugee crisis caused by the Anschluss and then Munich, he declared that

¹¹¹ Carr to Hull, October 27, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.64.

¹¹² Carr to Hull, telegram no. 285, October 7, 1938, NARA, RG 84, 800 Czechoslovakia, vol. 68.

¹¹³ Travers to Secretary of State, October 7, 1938, NARA, RG 59, 760F.62/1547. Around the time of the Zilina conference, envoys from Budapest were undertaking meetings in Warsaw. Both nations were eager for a common border.

“there can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place to lay their heads.”¹¹⁴

The speech’s primary pitch was that in the face of such dangers, namely Germany’s uninhibited rearmament and militaristic ventures, the United States could not sit idly by but needed to pursue rearmament measures so that it could properly defend itself. Unfortunately for Czechoslovakia, Roosevelt’s statement, however condemning of Munich, was too little too late.

¹¹⁴ Roosevelt, “Text of Roosevelt’s Talk to Forum,” October 27, 1938, *New York Times*, 15.

Chapter Two: “Consolidation”

There seem to be very few people here who are convinced that the present situation is permanent and who do not fear that the outcome, sooner or later, will be a German occupation.¹

So said Wilbur J. Carr in a February report to the State Department. Four months had passed since Munich, a period during which the emergent Czechoslovakia, now with a new name “Czecho-Slovakia,” struggled mightily to consolidate its truncated territories and retain a semblance of its former dignity. The obstacles were demoralizing. Its internal structure—what was once a mostly stable relationship between Bohemia-Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia—was now ramshackle and mutinous. More problematic, though, were the incessant demands coming from Hitler, who was perpetually angry with Prague’s attitude and always wanting more. For many, then, the signs pointed toward a dismal destination—German occupation.

Not yet, though. In the months following Munich, a theme of consolidation came to typify the issues pertinent to U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Most prominently, the Prague government walked on eggshells as it tried to consolidate its position coming out of Munich and the subsequent revelation of the delimitation committee’s ‘fifth zone.’ Germany, stuffed full of territorial gains, embarked on a period of digestion, taking stock of its increased size and international prestige. As a result of the Teschen dispute and Vienna Award, Poland and Hungary, too, strove to consolidate their expanded frontiers, hoping to secure their permanency. In Ruthenia, zealous leaders encouraged by Germany worked to consolidate a pan-Ukrainian project. To the west, the Slovak government relished its newfound autonomy, consolidating itself under a decidedly pro-Nazi banner. Meanwhile, in Washington, American officials scrambled to consolidate U.S. foreign policy. The Roosevelt Administration, quickly dissatisfied with the

¹ Carr to Hull, NARA, RG 59, 860F.00.

implications of Munich, pivoted to make international affairs a primary concern.² The State Department, welcoming this change, grasped to find the right balance of paying attention to the outside world and remaining free from foreign entanglements. Finally, at the Schonborn, after getting over the shock and relief that accompanied the news of Munich, Carr, Kennan, and other American observers worked to consolidate their understanding of what exactly had taken place and to offer predictions for what was to come.

At the Schonborn, there was little substantive diplomatic work to do, especially when compared to the day-and-night reporting of the Munich crisis. Each day centered on the smaller, “innumerable details” that needed attention, whether it be the day to day reporting on Prague’s government, or settling visa and customs problems. While such tasks were essential to complete, the legation saw its greatest value in its ability to be an observer. The stakes, as dictated by Munich, were great. If all parties adhered to the agreement’s terms, thought Kennan, and if they marked the extent of Germany’s territorial aspirations, then there was a possibility that it would truly come to represent “peace in our time.” If the opposite were true, however, and if Hitler intended to drive further still into the heart of Europe, then the problems underlying Munich would only resurface in more serious forms.³

In the time between Munich and the German occupation in March, the United States was in a hapless position vis-à-vis Czecho-Slovakia. During the Second Republic, outside observers, Washington among them, watched Germany twist the clamp on the Czech lands week by week. The policies of Britain and France, particularly their reluctance to even discuss their promised

² Historian Basil Rauch argues that “within the three months after Munich, President Roosevelt completed the change-over from a political strategy whose primary emphasis was on the achievement of domestic reforms to one whose primary emphasis was on the achievement of a foreign policy of collective security.” Rauch, *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 80.

³ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 20.

guarantees to Czecho-Slovakia's borders, indicated that the two democracies intended to allow German hegemony in central and southeastern Europe.⁴ Even though such matters were thousands of miles away from Washington, the State Department did not like seeing Germany tighten its hold on the region. There were many reasons for the department's disapproval, and the moral principles that accompanied previous U.S.-Czech relations were not entirely absent.⁵ Still, the chief factors in determining Washington's wariness of Berlin were economic in nature. As the Reich extended its influence over Central Europe, its increasingly closed economy and uncompromising posture would inevitably extend as well. Unfortunately, to push back against Germany could have been construed as implicit criticism of Chamberlain and Daladier's handling of the region, so Washington preferred to remain quiet and neutral. Thus, for the United States, alignment with the Czechs and Slovaks necessarily took a backseat to its broader policy of keeping detached but cordial relations with Europe's two largest democracies.

Still, the Schonborn was not oblivious to the Prague government's dismal position. The dysfunction of the eastern provinces, Slovakia and Ruthenia, was clear enough, but the progressive erosion of Czech autonomy before the Germans was also hard to miss. The American legation reported often of the impossible demands Berlin levied on the Czechs, signaling to American observers that no matter Prague's efforts, Czecho-Slovakia would likely never be successful in consolidating its borders. Over time, one could not avoid the conclusion that Hitler, for all his schemes, words, and plans, had any number of options at his disposal, all

⁴ Within a few weeks of Munich, growing opinion among British and French officials held that Czecho-Slovakia would inevitably become a German protectorate. It did not help that whenever London or Paris ever brought up the issue of Czecho-Slovakia's guarantees, Berlin responded angrily that the two democracies had already forgone influence in that region. Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 54, 79, and 82.

⁵ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 5-6, 1938, 1. The department did not altogether ignore the role of moral principle in its political relations with other countries. For instance, Moffat recalled serious discussions among the department's European and Far Eastern sections, in which they floated ideas of how to buck up the British, who they feared were going to strike the best possible bargain with Japan "irrespective of principle."

of which could be used as pretexts for further intervention in the state.⁶ As long as the legation stayed within this line of thinking—the simple understanding that Hitler was not yet finished with his expansionist policy—Carr, Kennan, and others were reasonably able to interpret the “signs of the times.”⁷ For the most part, the men of Schonborn were never lulled into baseless optimism regarding Czecho-Slovakia’s future. That, coupled with the full knowledge that they were in no position to intervene, meant that Carr and his staff remained passive observers to a most unfortunate period in Czech and Slovak history. The friendly, impotent relations that manifested as a result of Munich now played out over a period of many months.

For the Second Republic, one of its first tasks to address was the economic nightmare caused by Munich’s terms. 40% of her industrial capacity was gone. As Edward Lawson, the commercial attaché, had shown in his post-Munich reports, hardly an industry or business sector had emerged unscathed.⁸ The legation’s reports spoke of the fears among Czech circles that Hermann Goering, minister of Germany’s Four Year Economic Plan, would put the wounded economy out of its misery by imposing a customs union.⁹ Such a move would have given Berlin complete control of Czech-Slovakia’s industry, trade, and finances. To the relief of basically everyone, save the Germans, the customs union never materialized, but the American legation acknowledged that the extent to which Germany would dominate Czech-Slovakia’s economy, though still a matter of conjecture, looked major: “Germany is now in a position very nearly to dictate Czechoslovakia’s economic policy, should it so desire.”¹⁰

⁶ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ Lawson to Carr, “Economic Losses to Czechoslovakia Incident to the Loss of Territory to Germany,” October 10, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vol. III, 800.

⁹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 293, eleven a.m., NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1930-39, Box no. 3517, 660F.6231/89.

¹⁰ Raymond E. Cox, “Sudeten German Products Temporarily Admitted into Czechoslovakia Duty-Free,” October 31, 1938, NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1930-39, Box no. 3517, 660F.6231/92.

In Washington, the department was hardly eager to recognize Germany's Munich bounty. Smarting from Berlin's perennially uncooperative attitude toward trade and refugees, the department chose to put off granting *de jure* recognition of the Sudetenland's transfer. This course of action posed a problem, though, in that it allowed Berlin to take advantage of the generous trade deal that existed between Washington and Prague. Moffat worked closely with the Treasury Department in an effort to work out a solution in which the department could have its cake and eat it too. That is, to impose stricter duties on goods coming from the Sudetenland without extending *de jure* recognition to the Munich settlement. Hull, who harbored zero sympathy for Berlin, still found the entire situation to be a vexing one, as he feared that any sort of hardball could be interpreted as implicit criticism of the French and British, something which he hoped to avoid at all costs.¹¹

The Treasury pressed Moffat regarding the exact date of transfer, to which Moffat explained the question's basic discrepancy: "the Germans apparently claimed it took place upon the acceptance of the Munich Agreement, whereas the Czechs were claiming that it would not formally take place until the last formality connected with Munich was completed." While the State Department may have liked to side with the Czechs out of solidarity, practical considerations held greater sway, and Moffat acknowledged that as far as the department was concerned, "the territory has now been transferred."¹² Yet the department continued to pay acute attention to the semantics of phrasing. When preparing the statement for imposing harsher economic policies toward the Sudetenland, the Treasury preferred to say that the State

¹¹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 7, 1938, 1-2. Roosevelt had recently argued that "peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword." "Roosevelt Warns Nation Must Arm in World of Force," *New York Times*, October 27, 1938, 1. According to Moffat, Hull considered this to be a serious blow to Chamberlain; yet, Hull only briefly references Roosevelt's address in his memoirs. Hull, *Memoirs*, 597.

¹² Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 8, 1938, 1.

Department “recognize[s] the cession,” while Moffat was adamant that it say that the department only “notified the Treasury of a transfer of jurisdiction.” After “considerable argument,” the two sides settled on a compromise statement.¹³ When looking back, the issues at stake here seem trivial, but the interaction between Moffat and the Treasury demonstrates the desire on the part of the State Department to both tread carefully and, in the small areas of influence it did have, to show partiality to the Czechs in the context of U.S.-German-Czech relations.

Vast movements of people only exasperated Czecho-Slovakia’s economic disarray. While the International Commission ironed out Munich’s borders, Carr and the American legation watched the disastrous refugee crisis that began at Munich continue unabated in the ensuing weeks. A month after the Munich diktat, Mary Hawes, the *Washington Post’s* correspondent in Czecho-Slovakia, called the refugee crisis a “fantastic endless nightmare.” Jews and anti-Nazi Germans poured into the rump state penniless and jobless, and Czech authorities implored them to return to their homes, already overwhelmed with the influx of Czechs in need of help. “In the name of peace,” wrote Hawes, “human beings are sacrificed to the greed of other nations for mines, factories, and railroads.” According to Hawes, “one poor school teacher suddenly found her parents were now in Germany, her brother and sister in Poland, herself in Czechoslovakia, and yet not one of them had moved.”¹⁴

The refugee situation was made worse by the amorphous borders that now separated Czecho-Slovakia from the Reich. Even as late as mid-November, when the work of the delimitation committee was just about finished, the border remained confused and contested. Edward Lawson, the commercial attaché, took frequent trips to the new borderlands and sensed

¹³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 9, 1938, 1. The compromise statement read, “[The State Department] announced to the Treasury that a change of jurisdiction has taken place.”

¹⁴ Mary N. Hawes, “Orphans of Munich,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 1938, B9.

“constant apprehension” on the part of Czecho-Slovak citizens that the borders would soon change. Throughout October and November, the Germans and Poles pressed for additional delimitations in order to acquire useful patches of land here and there, prompting a sickened Hawes to write that “[t]oday you may go to bed in Czech territory only to wake up on railroad tracks, so it is impossible to travel from one part of the country to another without crossing them. [The borders] creep up on industries and factories, swallowing much of the wealth of the country. From all sides they are creeping in on Czechoslovakia.”¹⁵

The State Department was well aware of the chaotic movement of peoples between the Sudetenland and the Czechoslovak lands, as well as those moving to and from Hungary and Poland, but there was little the department could do to make it better. The Intergovernmental Committee, a group established by Roosevelt and tasked with tackling the refugee crisis in the wake of the Anschluss, was utterly bogged down by unending red tape and the unhelpfulness, or more often the sabotage, of the Germans.¹⁶

It was not to the United States, however, that Prague looked for the bulk of its needed assistance. Having been betrayed and beaten down by the European democracies, Prague hoped that London and Paris would at least provide substantive assistance to help make the new state viable. London initially promised ten million pounds, but the French balked. Later, when Prague spoke of the urgent need for additional funds, the British and French were equally hesitant, both

¹⁵ Mary N. Hawes, “Marching Frontiers,” *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1938, 11.

¹⁶ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 3, 1938, 1-2. By early November, Myron Taylor, the U.S. representative on the Intergovernmental Committee, was already deeply discouraged by the outlook of the committee’s prospects, prompting him to consider shifting refugee responsibilities back to the League of Nations. George Messersmith, who poured his “heart and soul” into the refugee problem, also felt that the Intergovernmental Committee never should have been created in the first place; rather, like Taylor, he argued the efforts should have sprung from the League’s existing apparatuses. Messersmith, along with Taylor and others, feared that Germany would use the refugee problem as a pawn to secure better trade agreements. Messersmith to Geist, November 7, 1938, Messersmith Papers. With such little momentum from the outset, the Intergovernmental Committee could never devote any serious attention to the pressing problems in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 4, 1938, 4.

fearing that aid would eventually end up in German hands. Talk of loans dragged into November and December.¹⁷

Though the U.S. government was in no position to offer loans, the United States was home to significant private efforts, especially those spearheaded by Czech and Slovak emigres.¹⁸ They worked quickly to raise large sums, but they also, like the British and French, had reservations about where the money was ending up. The American legation received numerous inquiries from potential givers, who understandably wanted to ensure their contributions fell into good hands. Unfortunately, the tendency to double-check delayed the arrival of relief to Prague during its most critical hour. For instance, the American Committee for Relief in Czechoslovakia, operating out of New York and gathering donations from cities across the country, endeavored through a long exchange of letters with Carr and Kennan to ensure that its charity would be allocated to responsible parties. It was not until after one-and-a-half months of correspondence that the committee and the legation moved forward in transferring the money to the Czech National Relief Board.¹⁹ From the legation's viewpoint, despite all the trouble brewing in Bohemia and Moravia, trustworthy relief organizations were continuing their work unchallenged.²⁰

¹⁷ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 54-56. Prague also disagreed with Paris and London over how the loans should be used. The Prague government wanted to utilize a large portion of the loans for rebuilding the state. Paris and London expected the majority of the money to go toward the refugee crisis, especially Jewish victims. Altogether, Britain and France gave sixteen million pounds to Czecho-Slovakia.

¹⁸ Though the United States did not officially provide substantial aid to Czecho-Slovakia, it did facilitate large provisions from organizations like the American Red Cross.

¹⁹ Brackett Lewis to Carr, December 15, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, 800. Part of the reason for the committee's caution was the fact that Alice Masaryk, daughter of Tomas Masaryk, had stepped down from leading the Czechoslovak Red Cross soon after Munich. Alice Masaryk was a trusted friend to many Americans, and her stepping down worried American circles that Czech relief organizations were under direct German pressure. Carr and Kennan saw no evidence of that being the case.

²⁰ Kennan to Brackett Lewis, January 5, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1939, 800.

It is one thing for a country with a stable, functioning government to navigate statewide crises, but it is an entirely different story when no such government exists. In Czecho-Slovakia's Second Republic, the Prague government, though never altogether absent, was in a serious state of flux. With Benes gone, the presidency remained vacant for nearly two months. General Syrový continued to serve as the prime minister, which, given his background of military discipline, proved helpful for maintaining law and order during the post-Munich confusion.

The American legation held out little hope for the new government. From what they could gather, it appeared that Chvalkovsky, who had succeeded Krofta as foreign minister in early October, would be chosen as the new president of Czecho-Slovakia. The legation took special note of the miserable responsibilities that would be laid before Chvalkovsky in having to haggle with Hitler for decent treatment. Carr reported that if he were to become president, Chvalkovsky would need to visit Berlin and submit a desperate "personal plea" for leniency.²¹ Carr was not optimistic that such a request would be well-received by Hitler, who continued to unearth new grievances toward the rump state. It was no secret that Berlin coveted more territories, ones it deemed necessary for various infrastructure projects. For instance, Carr expected that Hitler would demand the town of Devin, located near Bratislava, for the purposes of a canal, and that this new demand would put Chvalkovsky in an impossible situation, for if Chvalkovsky were to assume the presidency, it would be hardly encouraging to begin his service with major concessions to Hitler.²² Not only would it be utterly disheartening to Chvalkovsky,

²¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 334, November 18, 1938, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1855.

²² Hitler did eventually take Devin. In mid-November, Czecho-Slovakia and Germany reached a final border delimitation agreement in which Prague reacquired a number of towns, while Germany acquired even more, including Devin. The canal was to be constructed jointly by the Czechs and Germans, although it was never completed. Carr to Hull, telegram no. 335, November 22, 1938, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00.

but Carr feared the impact it would have on the people, “whose cup of discouragement is already dangerously full.”²³ The prospects were grim.

Chvalkovsky, however, refused the position. He felt himself to be too unpopular with the people.²⁴ Instead, the presidency went to someone far removed from politics, Dr. Emil Hacha, a respected, cultured, though thoroughly colorless judge. The legation surmised that the sixty-seven-year-old Hacha was chosen, not for his positive qualities, but for the negative ones. He was not associated with any political party; he possessed no foreign entanglements; and he had no non-Aryan “twigs” in the family tree.²⁵ In short, with anti-Benes feelings carrying the day in Prague, Hacha appealed to the “various hues of the political right.”²⁶ He was also a devout Catholic, making him palatable to the Slovaks. From the Schonborn’s point-of-view, Hacha’s election was “a more pathetic than joyous occasion.” Though the populace did not dislike Hacha personally, it viewed him as a “figurehead set up by unseen powers.” Carr surmised that much of the dissatisfaction could be attributed to the simple fact that it had still only been a short time since Munich’s full delimitations became public, and the people remained “bitter and skeptical concerning the possibilities for the future,” a future that would likely be bound to Germany.²⁷

²³ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 334, 760F.62/1855.

²⁴ Prochazka adds that Chvalkovsky’s many years in the foreign service had “alienated him from the problems of domestic policy.” Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 68. Carr guessed that Chvalkovsky did not want the presidency, knowing that the position would be one of a figurehead and sycophant. Carr to Hull, telegram no. 337, November 23, 1938, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/577.

²⁵ Carr to Hull, “Biographical Data Concerning President Emil Hacha,” no. 291, November 30, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vol. III, 800.1, 1-2. The legation’s statement that Hacha had no “non-Aryan twigs” was not completely true. His daughter was married to a Jew, and German observers complained that this fact caused Hacha to dance around anti-Semitic measures. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 37.

²⁶ Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 42. Bryant, writing from a today’s perspective, is fairly critical of Hacha and the Second Republic, which “welcomed” anti-Semitic measures and the undoing of democratic structures. Hacha’s American contemporaries, namely Carr and Kennan, saw the president in a more sympathetic light—a hapless, ineffectual martyr: “the most tragic and pathetic of the lot.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, xxiii. That is how Hacha saw himself. For instance, when talking to a Czech writer in spring 1939, he said, “Who am I, Emil Hacha?...I am quite an ordinary person who will return to dust like everyone else.” Quoted in Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 42.

²⁷ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 342, December 1, 1938, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/581.

However, while the legation doubted whether Hacha would come to represent a bulwark against Berlin's encroaching presence, it was not wholly pessimistic, noting that Hacha's ascension did help the country overcome a significant obstacle on what everyone in the Schonborn agreed would be a "stony path" ahead.²⁸

Soon after Hacha's election, Syrový's government resigned and Rudolf Beran was appointed prime minister. The Schonborn's report emphasized Beran's connections to agriculture. He came from farming stock; he apprenticed under Czechoslovakia's foremost leader of the Agrarian Party; he represented agrarian interests in parliament, and his chief hobby, apart from hunting, was the study of agricultural systems in foreign countries.²⁹ The report offered no predictions as to what a Beran premiership would look like, but it was widely understood that the new government would adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Germany. Indeed, with the Beran government at the helm, "appeasement under the duress of the situation became the predominant line in Czechoslovak politics."³⁰ Later, when Beran gave his first speech to parliament, the legation reported its moderate, unsurprising content. As expected, Beran highlighted Czecho-Slovakia's need for a strong friendship with Germany, but not exclusively so. "We are not and shall not be protagonists of isolation or of confining ourselves to our own geographical area," said Beran, before telling parliament that his government would strive for good relations with other states, specifically mentioning England, France, and the

²⁸ Carr to Hull, "Biographical Data Concerning President Emil Hacha," no. 291, November 30, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vol. III, 800.1, 1-2. In regard to Hacha not being a bulwark, during an inaugural interview (one that was later censored from the public), and when speaking on the topic of Czech-German relations, Hacha stated, "This will be a very close relationship...one needs only to glance at the map...Germany has always been an example to us...it will facilitate the way into the future."

²⁹ Carr to Hull, "Biographical Sketch of Rudolf Beran," no. 294, December 3, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vol. IX, 800.1.

³⁰ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 69.

United States. Overall, the speech was straightforward, and it seemed to cause no discouragement to the Schonborn.³¹

The establishment of Hacha and Beran's government coincided with the formalizing of Slovakia's and Ruthenia's increased autonomy. As a result of the Zilina meeting, as well as legislation passed under Syrový's government, Slovakia and Ruthenia, though still part of the federalized Czecho-Slovak state, gained tighter control over their respective domestic affairs in addition to broader issues of trade and foreign policy, primarily through regional governments headed by their own prime ministers. The provinces also secured greater representation in Prague. Karol Sidor, who the legation considered the second "most ardent exponent of Slovak autonomy," became Beran's deputy prime minister in Prague.³² Subsequent autonomy bills increased Slovakia's independence, and in mid-December the province held elections. The only option for voters was a Tiso-Sidor ticket, and its 'victory' ushered in an era of one-party politics in Slovakia. Meanwhile, in Ruthenia, Ukrainian nationalists with German support seized control of the province's rudimentary political structures.³³

The weeks of late-November and early December, when distinct Czech, Slovak, and Ruthenian governments emerged, constituted a watershed period in U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Though the legation had long recognized the differences between the peoples that made up Czechoslovakia, it was not until the end of 1938 that it began treating Bohemia-Moravia,

³¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 348, December 14, 1938, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/854. The legation wrote that Beran's government would be "moderately authoritative" with free market principles and continued control over the press, radio, and cultural activities.

³² Carr to Hull, "Biographical Sketch of Karol Sidor," December 3, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vo. IX, 800.1, 1. Who was the first most ardent exponent of Slovak autonomy? That honor fell to Father Andrej Hlinka, founder of the Hlinka People's Party. When Hlinka passed away in August 1938, the legation produced a long report for the department on Hlinka's significance and the future of his People's Party.

³³ Carr to Hull, "The New Governments in Czechoslovakia," no. 294, December 3, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, Vol. IX, 900.1, 1-4.

Slovakia, and to a lesser extent Ruthenia, as separate states pursuing their own courses.³⁴ Far from just tacit recognition by the legation that Slovakia and Ruthenia had more political autonomy, Carr, Kennan, their colleagues, and by extension officials in Washington, began viewing the Czech, Slovak, and Ruthenian peoples as possessing fundamentally different traits and inclinations. They were no longer parts of a whole, but separate groups altogether which, at their cores, did not belong together in a unified state.

As the three provinces went their own ways, the legation reported the unique issues they encountered. For the government in Prague—the Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia—one thread woven into its fabric was the futile struggle for secured borders. Guaranteed frontiers had been an important addendum to the Munich Agreement, and Prague earnestly pursued these guarantees from Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. During the first few months of the Second Republic, Czech officials spoke hopefully to their American listeners, predicating that once the border guarantees had been finalized, then Czecho-Slovakia would be able to operate as an independent, mostly healthy state. Unfortunately, when Chvalkovsky brought the issue of the guarantees to Ribbentrop and Hitler's attention during his visit to Berlin in mid-October, the two responded negatively, arguing that it would be foolish for Prague to put any faith in guarantees from Britain and France. London and Paris, like Hitler claimed, proved unreliable, lamely stating that guarantees should only come into play if Czecho-Slovakia were threatened by new territorial losses. Later, in mid-November, once all the border delimitations had been completely settled, Chvalkovsky sent demarches to the four powers, explaining that the prerequisites of the

³⁴ For instance, in a personal letter, Kennan remarked that one could no longer gather sufficient information about Slovakia and Ruthenia from Prague. Each province was going its own way. In light of such, Kennan recommended that the department establish a career vice-consulate in the two eastern provinces, or at the very least in Bratislava. Kennan to Robert Coe, January 17, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1939, Vol. III, 800, 2. Carr expressed a similar outlook. When summarizing the policy of the new Rudolf Beran government, Carr emphasized to the department that Beran's statements applied "in reality only to Bohemia and Moravia." Carr to Hull, telegram no. 348, December 14, 1938, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/854.

guarantees had been met—that is, every country, including Poland and Hungary, expressed contentment with the final borders—and therefore the guarantees ought to be confirmed. Germany outright rejected Chvalkovsky’s notion, and the other three governments weaseled out of responsibility with excuses of varying kinds.³⁵

A few weeks later, Carr met with Chvalkovsky for a long interview, during which he inquired about the status of the guarantees. Chvalkovsky explained to Carr the measures he had taken up to that point. He expounded on the messages received from Britain and France after sending the demarches to the four powers. Paris had replied that steps forward could be taken only if the four powers did so in concert—no small task. Contrarily, London suggested that if she were to act on the guarantees, she could only do so alone.³⁶ For having helped draft the Munich agreement, London demonstrated incredible unfamiliarity with its terms. Chvalkovsky had heard nothing since. According to Carr, the foreign minister talked about the issue apathetically, saying he had “no opinion” on the guarantees.³⁷ In his report to the department, Carr suggested that Prague had come to realize that guarantees from Britain and France were meaningless. Carr anticipated that Chvalkovsky and his colleagues would rest content in the fact that all pertinent parties had expressed satisfaction with the final delimitations. Chvalkovsky had made it clear to Carr that “at present,” and Chvalkovsky made sure to emphasize that phrase, he did not fear Hitler making another move on Czecho-Slovakia.³⁸

Even if Chvalkovsky had given up on the idea of guaranteed borders, Berlin still found it useful to dangle the idea of them in front of Prague. Later, during Chvalkovsky’s depressing visit

³⁵ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 76-83. It was not until November 22 that Carr could report to the department that Prague and Berlin had finally reached a conclusive agreement on the new border. Carr to Hull, telegram no. 335, November 22, 1939, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62.

³⁶ Carr to Hull, “Minister’s Conversation with the Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Chvalkovsky,” no. 307, December 29, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1939, Vol. III, 800, 6-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

to Berlin in January, Hitler would suggest that if Prague were to right the ship—that is, to adopt hardline anti-Semitic policies and to reduce the military to a size similar to Denmark, essentially nonexistent—then it would at last be agreeable for Germany to guarantee Czecho-Slovakia’s new boundaries.³⁹ It was an outright lie, and the guarantees never came.

As Prague grasped at straws for guarantees, the legation reported Bratislava’s own sets of issues, particularly its prickly relations with Budapest. On November 2, Hungary finally had its long-awaited moment. Meeting in Vienna, Germany and Italy agreed to Hungary’s territorial demands, granting it significant chunks of Slovak land. The Vienna Award was in many ways a measly rehash of what had taken place roughly a month earlier. This time it was just Italy and Germany making the final decisions. Hungary was finally getting its slice of the pie. Coming back into sight were all the familiar things that accompanied agreements of this type: delimitation maps and occupation dates, evacuation stages, and commissions dealing with the inevitable disputes that would arise in the days following the agreement. The American legation in Budapest reported to the department that, naturally, it was not long before people in Hungary found cause for complaint: Slovakia had unjustifiably kept Bratislava!⁴⁰ It only took a couple weeks before the popular favor that Hungarians had initially held toward the Vienna Award faded completely. New ambitions swirled within the government and populace, demanding Bela

³⁹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 7, January 26, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1911. In regard to the Czechoslovak military, according to Carr, “Hitler has also asked that the Czechoslovak army be reduced and that the country agree to be neutralized or at least to place itself in much the position of Holland and Denmark. Germany, Hitler had said, had no desire to ever attack either of those countries and would have the same attitude toward Czechoslovakia if she should reduce her army and bring herself into harmony with the policies of the Reich.”

⁴⁰ Summary of dispatch, December 7, Legation in Budapest to Hull, November 16, 1938, no. 1282, 1938, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64.

Imredy, Hungary's Prime Minister, to obtain Ruthenia, which Budapest's papers were now calling "a narrow strip of land temporarily remaining outside Hungary."⁴¹

Before long, Slovakia too grew dissatisfied with its losses through the Vienna agreement, beginning its own irredentist campaign. Fresh off its mid-month elections, Slovakia, brimming with confidence and egged on by Germany, unleashed the agitation of irredentism, accusing Budapest of mistreating its Slovak minority, calling the decisions of the Vienna accord into question, and filling its papers with sensational claims of Hungarian atrocities.⁴² Considering Prague and Bratislava had been making a point to avoid pressing territorial claims since November, those at the Schonborn felt that Bratislava's *volte face* must have meant that Berlin's influence, led by Franz Karmasin, had gotten the better of Bratislava.⁴³ In his reporting, Kennan found that the Czechs in Prague were watching the entire affair with both a lack of interest and a shortage of information. They saw it as simply another case of the Slovaks expressing their annoyance over how they had been treated. The American legation was still inclined to believe that Berlin was at the root of the movement, but if they were not, then the Slovaks were playing on dangerously "thin ice."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Summary of dispatch, December 12, 1938, Legation in Budapest to Hull, November 16, 1938, no. 1283, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64. Hungary's attitude toward Germany was complex, even after the Vienna settlement. Miklos Horthy, the regent, admired Germany and arguably carried the most sway in Hungary's policy. Kalman Kanya, the foreign minister, was inclined toward rapprochement with Czechoslovakia, the Little Entente, and Central Europe in general, knowing that closeness with Berlin would inevitably lead to absorption into the Reich. Nazi Germans actively worked against Kanya's sentiment within Hungary, and U.S. officials considered Hungary's position likely to go the way of Berlin. Messersmith to Hull, November 10, 1938, no. 1072-1073, Box 10, Folder 69, Messersmith Papers, 1-4.

⁴² Carr to Hull, "Slovak-Hungarian Relations," no. 305, December 28, 1938, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 33, 760F.64/236. The legation cited a few examples, such as "Hungarian Frenzy Knows No bounds."

⁴³ Summary of Dispatch, February 8, 1939, Legation at Prague to Hull, December 28, 1938, no. 305, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 33, 760F.64, 1-2. Franz Karmasin was a Sudeten German and the leading German politician setting up shop in the eastern province and pushing German aims. In its report, the legation emphasized that "it seems hardly likely that the Slovaks would have taken a step of this sort without German consent."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

Ruthenia, which the American legation viewed as a backward and impossibly confusing place, wrestled with its own problems coming out of the Vienna Award. The altered borders forced Ruthenia's government officials to move from Koisce to Chust, a place which could hardly accommodate the roving government.⁴⁵ To Carr, the situation in Ruthenia looked especially bleak. During the move to Chust, an official was dismissed for being too cozy with the Hungarians, hardly the first instance of that happening.⁴⁶ The true meddling force in Ruthenia was Berlin, though. German forces had established prominent influence there soon after Munich, and many assumed that Hitler was working to incite Ukrainians from Ruthenia, Rumania, Poland, and the Soviet Union to form an independent state.⁴⁷ When pressing Chvalkovsky on the matter, Carr received a less than helpful response: "The Foreign Minister, however, pretends to be well aware of the plans which Hitler has in store for next spring and he has assured me that they envisage action in quite another direction concerning which he smilingly avoided being explicit." Reports from Biddle a week later suggested that Hitler allowed Prague to keep Ruthenia precisely because a Czech-controlled Ruthenia would be easier to influence than a Hungarian-controlled Ruthenia, and Hitler desired ease of access in his efforts to use the Ukrainian minority against Poland.⁴⁸

For all the disunity between Prague and the Slovaks and Ruthenians, a relationship that Carr referred to as "obscure," the central government located in Prague retained a level of jurisdiction over the entire state. The Sudeten-Czech frontier was a different story, though, as

⁴⁵ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 327, November 10, 1938, three p.m., NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64/201.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 345, December 2, 1938, noon, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/582. Ruthenia also had pro-Russian natives, and it was widely assumed that the Germans were actively pushing for the Ukrainian faction to supersede the Russian faction, which is exactly what happened.

⁴⁸ Summary of dispatch, Biddle to Hull, telegram no. 779, November 21, 1938, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64/205. In addition to being helpful in neutralizing the Poles, Biddle believed that Hitler also planned to use the Ukrainian minority as a "potential springboard into the Russian Ukraine [i.e. Soviet Union]."

disagreements led to permanently confused borders into the winter. Sudeten towns on the frontier became miniature battlegrounds for Czech and German influence. Once, when dining at a Sudeten hotel, Kennan and his wife observed the waiters and hostesses greet patrons with uncertain utterances of “Heil Hitler.”⁴⁹ In Czech cities that had become frontier towns as a result of Munich, like Olmouc and Morvska Ostrava, German officials pressured Czech citizens to declare themselves German, and in some instances the Gestapo exercised nearly limitless influence.⁵⁰ As the weeks and months passed, Czechoslovakia both faded and remained, truly a state in flux and in between. When returning from a journey to northern Europe, Kennan recalled how, after passing through all the military patrols and border gates in the Sudetenland, he changed from driving on the right to driving on the left, “for Bohemia was still—in an unreal, transitory sense—Czechoslovakia.”⁵¹

Czecho-Slovakia’s internal duress was made worse by ever present external threats. Ruthenia appeared to be easy prey, especially with rumors of German exploitation. Prague feared the loss of Ruthenia, as it would likely mean a more powerful Germany, or a common border between Poland and Hungary. When referring to Chvalkovsky’s assurance that all was well with “loyal” Ruthenia, Carr could not help but notice “an air of whistling to keep up his courage.”⁵² Montgomery and Biddle’s reports indicated that Hungary and Poland generally supported one another in each other’s efforts to secure a common border, which most often revolved around an

⁴⁹ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵² Carr to Hull, telegram no. 327, November 10, 1938, three p.m., NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64/201.

occupation of Ruthenia. According to Biddle, by mid-November, Colonel Beck was firmly supporting Hungary's seizure of the little province.⁵³

Beyond Hungary's incessant testing of the waters in the Slovak and Ruthenian border regions, there was also potential conflict with Poland. In December 1938, Biddle reported to the department the large contingent in Warsaw that was pushing for a fight with Prague, a disposition that was made more intense by the tendency of rogue Czech and Slovak bands to cause trouble in the Teschen district.⁵⁴ Charles Elbrick, a secretary at the Prague legation, learned from a Czech informant that Berlin was playing around with the idea of using the remnants of the Czech army against Poland. For that reason, Berlin was doing all it could to stir up anti-Polish feeling in Czechoslovakia and vice versa.⁵⁵

With so many external threats, at least one friend remained. Rumania, Czechoslovakia's ever-present but useless ally, came stoutly to Prague's aid in the aftermath of the Vienna Award, declaring Hungary's pretensions "unreasonable, excessive, and unjust." The American legation in Bucharest was unimpressed, however, calling its reaction "ostrich-like" and naïve. To the American observers, Rumania was oozing gullibility, acting as though "poor Czechoslovakia has made all the sacrifices for peace; everything is now settled and there will never be any more of those distressing problems."⁵⁶

⁵³ Summary of dispatch, Biddle to Hull, telegram no. 764, November 15, 1938, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64/203. Beck argued that as a result of Munich and the Vienna Award, much of Ruthenia had been effectively cut off from the rest of Czechoslovakia and thus naturally fell into Budapest's orbit.

⁵⁴ Anthony Biddle, Jr., *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War: The Diplomatic Papers of A.J. Drexel Biddle, Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland, 1937-1939* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 272-274; 286-289.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 287-288.

⁵⁶ Summary of dispatch, December 8, 1938, Legation in Bucharest to Hull, November 12, 1938, no. 614, NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64. By "ostrich-like," the legation implied that Bucharest was ignoring the dangers it faced in conjunction with Czechoslovakia's situation, and that the problems thereof would probably catch up with Rumania eventually.

In the final weeks of December, as the new year crept closer, the legation's work in Prague settled down a bit. On the one hand, as a result of the December elections, the Vienna Accord, and final Czech-German delimitations, some of Czecho-Slovakia's most important loose ends had been tied up. On December 16, Carr reported that the central government in Prague had passed the Enabling Act, allowing it to rule by decree. While the legislation signaled further erosion of the country's democratic traditions, Carr put it in positive light to the department: "In so far as it promises to assure internal stability for some time to come its passage may be said to mark the end of the crucial phase of immediate post Munich adjustments in Czech political life."⁵⁷ On the other hand, tensions between Czecho-Slovakia and Germany, Hungary, and Poland remained high, and few expected the stability that came from new governments and formalized borders to last forever. Still, things had at least settled down to a point where Carr felt comfortable in finally asking the department to consider the restoration work he had long wanted for the Schonborn.⁵⁸ Beyond heating and electrical problems, Carr was most determined to acquire furniture befitting of the old, Baroque palace and its nineteen-foot ceilings.⁵⁹

At the end of December, Carr left for a much-needed vacation. About a week later, Kennan happily reported to the minister that things were going well at the Schonborn: "peace and quiet hover over our little establishment here—at least to such extent as it normally does." That is not to say circumstances had slowed down completely, however. The consulate, for instance, received its record number of visitors, 950, just a couple days earlier. Adding to the

⁵⁷ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 350, December 16, 1938, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/585.

⁵⁸ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 344, December 2, 1938, eleven a.m., NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1930-39, Box no. 791, 124.60F/479.

⁵⁹ Carr to Hull, no. 299, "Proposed Alterations and Conservation Repairs to the Legation Building," December 14, 1938, NARA, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1930-39, Box no. 791, 7-9. In his twelve-page report, Carr outlined potential restorations with the same exactitude he used in his work, even specifying the exact types of wall decorations the legation needed: "I would suggest copies of the portraits of Jefferson and Lincoln in antique, gold frames about four feet by four feet..."

troubles was that the flu had been making its way through the legation.⁶⁰ Then, a few days before Christmas, Kennan's children arrived in Prague. "[C]onditions in Czechoslovakia are now being observed by two pairs of eyes much sharper and more intelligent than my own," Kennan wrote the minister.⁶¹ Christmastime in Prague that year was, as it always was, beautiful. Yet even the Kennan's Christmas tree, all decorated and lit up for the kids, could not dispel the feeling that "clouds of war and desolation moved steadily closer" and an "uneasy lightning played on the horizons of Europe."⁶²

"Today, —the first of the new year at the office, —was an extraordinarily quiet one. I wish it were symbolic of what is to come."⁶³ Moffat's hope for peace in the coming year, written on January 3, did not last long. There was never much question as to whether Hitler would reverse course and become calm and satisfied, but peace and quiet eluded Central Europe apart from German involvement, too.

Toward the end of the first week of January, Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians got into a border skirmish with Hungarian forces in the city of Munkacs, a city just over the Ruthenian border, and one that had formally belonged to Czechoslovakia before becoming a Hungarian possession as a result of the Vienna Award. Both sides predictably blamed each other, and the American correspondent on site, G.E.R. Gedye, doubted whether a satisfactory account of the conflict would ever materialize.⁶⁴ "Although it has become clear to the world at large—as from the first moment it was evident here would be the case—that Munich meant neither peace nor settlement, the fighting on the Czecho-Hungarian frontier at Munkacs...[has] usefully underlined

⁶⁰ Kennan to Carr, January 6, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence, Prague, Vol. III, 1939, 1.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kennan, "Prague—Munich to Occupation," 19.

⁶³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, January 3, 1938, 1.

⁶⁴ G.E.R. Gedye, "Hungarians Renew Fight with Czechs in Frontier Areas," *New York Times*, January 9, 1939, 1.

the lesson,” wrote Gedye.⁶⁵ The incident made front page news in the United States, and it was followed by more skirmishes, most of which led to at least a few deaths of soldiers and civilians alike.

The fighting over Munkacs highlighted so many of the region’s problems: Hungary’s belief that Slovakia and Ruthenia were unnatural states; the anger of Czecho-Slovak “terrorists” over their country’s unending concessions; Slovakia’s longing to back up its autonomy with security and respect. Amusingly, while Budapest levelled dramatic claims of Czech-Slovakia’s devilish behavior, Raymond Cox, secretary at the American legation, reported how Prague dismissed the incidents with bored apathy, calling them the unplanned results of “emotional tension between small groups of soldiers on either side.”⁶⁶ Most importantly, though, in the minds of American observers, the situation pointed toward Germany’s overarching control, as reports zipped through the department dissecting Berlin’s web of intervention: how it supported Czecho-Slovakia’s resistance to Hungary and Poland while fueling Hungary’s and Poland’s resistance toward Czecho-Slovakia; how it continued to incite Ruthenia’s Ukrainian population; and how its steadfast efforts to trigger chaos in Slovak-Hungarian-Polish border disputes perpetuated a confused and weak Danubian region. In Prague, the American legation saw the skirmishes as a reflection of Czecho-Slovakia’s severe dysfunction, while Washington listened to the Hungarian minister’s fevered protests with nothing to do but acknowledge that the situation was a messy omen for 1939.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ G.E.R. Gedye, “Czechs Shell Town at Hungarian Line,” *New York Times*, January 7, 1939, 1.

⁶⁶ Cox to Hull, telegram no. 220, January 11, 1939, one p.m., NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 32, 760F.64. According to Cox, the Czech Government also called for a mixed commission to look further into the matter.

⁶⁷ Moffat, diplomatic journal, January 7-8, 1939, 1-2. A leading thought among diplomatic circles continued to be that Hitler planned to incite and support the Ukrainian minorities in Ruthenia, Poland, and the Soviet Union as a means to weaken Soviet and Polish opposition. While he may have considered this for a time, Hitler abandoned the Ukrainian plan by the spring.

In January, with Carr still away on vacation, Kennan took a short trip to Slovakia and Ruthenia for reporting purposes. “I am looking forward very keenly to this trip—from the standpoint of interest, not comfort,” he said to the minister.⁶⁸ His reports from the eastern provinces during this time stand as the most crystallized pictures of American perspectives on quasi-independent Slovakia and Ruthenia. They demonstrate the prevailing view of Schonborn that the two regions’ people, both the leaders and general populaces, differed greatly from the Czechs.

First came Kennan’s excursion into Slovakia. Though American reportage from the region was sparse, a few months earlier *New York Times* correspondent G.E.R. Gedye had tried to capture the travails of Slovakia’s post-Munich venture into independence: “The outside world believes that a united Slovakia has now been freed of all outside interference and enjoys full liberty,” he wrote, before concluding that “Nothing could be further from the truth.”⁶⁹ Kennan believed that Slovakia’s desire to wrench itself free from Czech rule was sourced in the region’s natural affiliations with Hungary. On the face of it, Prague had done wonders for Slovakia, modernizing the region with such effectiveness that, when the time came for Slovakia’s southern frontier to pass into Hungarian hands, its cities became “models of progressiveness” to Budapest. The problem, argued Kennan, was that the very characteristics that typified Prague—liberalism, modernization, efficiency—pushed coarsely against the grain of Slovakia’s national character:

Rooted in centuries of Hungarian rule, the average Slovak is accustomed to have someone far more dashing, more romantic, more aristocratic, at once more cruel and more generous, to take orders from. Compared to the Hungarians, the Czech officials appear to the Slovaks timid, colorless, and pedantic. It is, I am afraid, not modern industrial “progress” that Slovakia wants. It is the atmosphere which radiates from Budapest.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kennan to Carr, January 6, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, Vol. III, 1939, 2.

⁶⁹ G.E.R. Gedye, “New Slovak State Torn by Dissension,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1938, 6.

⁷⁰ Kennan, “Prague: Munich—Occupation,” 1939, 39.

Czecho-Slovakia, then, and more specifically the ruling officials in Prague, fit Slovakia like “an oversized shoe.” After achieving independence in the wake of World War I, the Czechs worked to build up Slovakia’s intelligentsia, doing so with “more zeal than tact,” and their “schoolmasterish” approach antagonized the Slovaks.⁷¹ The Czechs’ off putting disposition provided fertile soil for the Slovak autonomous movements of Andrej Hlinka and Vojtech Tuka, as well as external disruption from the Germans and Poles.⁷² By 1939, Czech sentiments toward their compatriots in the east had become downright cold. Carr recorded that prominent Czechs saw the Slovaks as “children with new toys,” wanting to play with them for the time being. Prague figured that after a few years of ‘fun,’ the Slovaks would realize and appreciate how much they depended on the Czechs, particularly for financial support.⁷³

Kennan’s theory about Slovak affinity for Hungary, though maybe accurate in a macro sense, was not the view universally expressed by Slovaks. Kennan acknowledged that for the vast majority of Slovak citizens, the best solution was to remain united with the Czechs. Munich, however, had discredited the moderates, allowing extremist circles to seize the reins. There did remain some Slovak leaders in Bratislava who continued to oppose autonomy. For instance, Baron Beck, a Slovak elite who lived for a long time in Vienna, informed Carr in December that

⁷¹ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 14.

⁷² Andrej Hlinka was a Slovak priest and founder of the Hlinka People’s Party, a radical, anti-Semitic, separatist movement in Slovakia. By the mid-1930s, and especially during the Munich crisis, the Hlinka Party called for full autonomy from the Czechs. Hlinka died in August 1938. Vojtech Tuka was a Slovak politician who helped lead the most radical elements of the Hlinka People’s Party. He was imprisoned by the Czechs from 1928-1938 for espionage and treason. After Hlinka’s death, and following his release after Munich, Tuka became the most important presence in radical Slovak politics, especially in regard to rapprochement with Germany. For a detailed account of Hlinka and Tuka prior to Munich, see James Felak, *At the Price of the Republic: Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, 1929-1938* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1995).

⁷³ Carr, untitled notes, December 11, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Prague, 1939, 800. Kennan recorded similar sentiments among Czech circles, who dismissed Slovak behavior as that of a “headstrong child who has been given a new toy.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 19.

Slovakia had no desire to turn its back on Prague precisely because Budapest had rendered it so backwards. Beck further argued that Slovakia had no natural affinity for Berlin, and that Bratislava only wanted German money and investments.⁷⁴ Beck's views carried very little weight by 1939, however.

“The Slovaks have continued in general to have a riotous time playing at fascism,” remarked Kennan in a personal letter in January 1939. The comment cut at the heart of what American officials perceived to be one of the Second Republic's most pressing problems. With the radical elements having taken control of Slovakia's political system, the province strained to exercise its newfound autonomy. American observers were unimpressed. Slovak leaders seemed to have no definite plan for the future, relying on enthusiasm and “vague hopes” of economic development. With their tendency to move about in Nazi-style uniforms, Kennan commented, quite literally, that Slovakia's leaders were “all dressed up, and have no definite place to go.”⁷⁵ During his visit, Kennan met with the region's three main leaders: Tiso, Tuka, and Mach.⁷⁶ Coming away from those conversations, Kennan was convinced that their dispositions reflected either “intense naivety” or “blind selfishness.” Regardless of which it was, Kennan thought it unfortunate, for it moved the Slovaks to “let themselves be used as pawns against other small peoples, merely in return for glittering promises of sudden favor and prosperity at the hands of some great power.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Carr, untitled notes, December 11, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Prague, 1939, 800.

⁷⁵ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 16.

⁷⁶ Alexander Mach was a radical Slovak separatist in the likeness of Tuka. He served as Slovakia's minister of interior from 1939-1945. For a critical treatment of the leadership dynamics of Tiso, a moderate, and Tuka and Mach, two radicals, see Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1939-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976). For a more generous treatment, see Joseph Mikus, *Slovakia: A Political History: 1918-1950* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963).

⁷⁷ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 22.

Kennan felt that the most critical aspect of Slovakia's problems was her relationship with Germany. Bratislava's Hotel Carlton had become a petri dish of unofficial Austrian and German envoys, and Slovak representatives had a hard time concealing their senses of personal importance. It was the "comic-opera center of Central European intrigue and diplomacy," Kennan recalled.⁷⁸ Ultimately, Kennan found the Slovaks to be sincere but woefully unaware of Germany's control over them. They believed they were exploiting the Reich for their advantage, when in reality they were "completely in German power and such autonomy as they enjoy exists only through the grace of Hitler."⁷⁹

When Slovakia did manage to sleuth away from its German leash, Berlin would promptly scold her and reattach the leash. Carr and Kennan noted a few examples of this, such as Slovakia's attempt to establish a state-wide labor union and its unannounced December census. According to Kennan, the census fiasco especially infuriated the Germans because its spur-of-the-moment style left Berlin no time "to import Germans into Slovakia from all directions for the *event*." Kennan offered tongue-in-cheek sympathy for the "poor Slovaks" who would probably never be able to publish the results of their labors. The affair was further proof that Germany owned the region and therefore Slovakia had to play by its rules: "In general, there is something deeply shocking to the popular mind in this part of the world about the idea of an impartial and unprepared census, and there is a general feeling that the Slovaks have not observed the rules of the game."⁸⁰

Part of the problem for Slovakia was that as much as she wanted to test the limits of her autonomy, she was still financially dependent upon Bohemia-Moravia. To American observers,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁹ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 18.

⁸⁰ Kennan to Robert Coe, personal letter, January 6, 1939, NARA, RG 84, American Legation Prague, 1938, Vol. VIII, Correspondence File, no. 800, 4.

this resulted in a shameless hypocrisy whereby Bratislava tried to continue its hostility toward the Czechs while luring Czech tourism and capital inside its borders. On this issue, the Schonborn's sympathies lay squarely with the Czechs. Ever since Munich, the Slovaks had exploited their position vis-à-vis the Czechs "ruthlessly," yet the Czechs responded with "remarkable equanimity."⁸¹ German influences pounded Czechoslovakia's eastern provinces, proving especially successful in luring the "irresponsible" anti-Czech Hlinka Guards further away from Prague. Even while Prague itself felt the burden of servicing Berlin's wishes, it still did not like financing Slovakia if the funds were just being rerouted to the Nazi purse.⁸²

After Slovakia, Kennan made his way to Ruthenia. Lured there by the "fantastic tales" he had heard of the backwards province. Its mid-winter's frigid, unforgiving weather matched the experience to come.⁸³ Due to Munich, one had to travel through Hungary in order to reach Ruthenia. Once in Chust, the new capital, Kennan found Ruthenian "stooges" who, along with Ukrainian emigres, were preparing to establish and rule Greater Ukraine. Kennan found the whole display diluted and embarrassing: "So they went boisterously on, marching their miniature militia up and down, squabbling among themselves as to who would be the Fuhrer of greater Ukraine, demanding food and money from the Czechs, spending a good part of the funds they got on political propaganda of a purely Nazi color, and howling with indignation at the insistence of the Czechs that they have a voice in the expenditure of the funds."

Ruthenia, virtually cut off from the rest of the country after Munich, was also dependent on forces outside the regional government. The Germans, who had established political control in the province, had no desire to sink funds into the poverty-stricken place. Yet, not wanting to

⁸¹ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 19.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Kennan, "Prague—Munich to Occupation," 24.

see Ruthenia sink into inexistence, which would necessarily mean the end of the Ukrainian project, the Germans pressured Prague to pump money into Chust. The Czechs obliged, a decision which Kennan thought was the result of Prague's lingering concern over prestige.⁸⁴ Thus, it was the Czechs who transported the government to Chust, kept the people fed, and fought back skirmishers from Poland and Hungary.

In contrast to Ruthenia's vain leaders, the Czech presence in Chust, like the one in Bratislava, deepened the legation's esteem for the Czech side of things. First and foremost, in Ruthenia the Czechs were "long-suffering," for day after day Czech army trucks motored food into the province, providing daily bread to a place ruled by leaders too busy celebrating their moment of glory. Beyond sustenance, Prague maintained Ruthenia financially through a constant influx of funds. Wanting to have a say in how such funds were spent, Prague placed General Lev Prchala, a Czech military officer, in Ruthenia's regional government.⁸⁵ Chust's leaders resented both Prague and Prchala for this, throwing "tantrums" in response, and Kennan guessed that Prchala, who hardly felt comfortable leaving his apartment, was the most miserable potentate he ever encountered.⁸⁶

Like with Slovakia, Kennan and other American observers distinguished between Ruthenia's leaders and its populace. "They were neither Ukrainians nor Russians nor Czechs nor Hungarians. They were simply themselves, Ruthenians—an ignorant, poverty-stricken, disease-

⁸⁴ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 73.

⁸⁵ Carr to Hull, "General Lev Prchala Appointed to Ruthenian Regional Government," no. 315, January 17, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondent File, Prague, 1939, 800.2. The legation reported that Ruthenia's German presence was deeply angered by Prchala's appointment, considering it an overstep by the Prague government.

⁸⁶ Kennan, "Prague—Munich to Occupation," 25-27. According to the legation's biographical report, Prchala had a "forceful" personality, as well as an excellent reputation and military record. His meek efforts in Chust, then, suggest the city's confusion and the strength of the German presence. Carr to Hull, "Confidential Biographic Data," Prchala, January 17, 1938, NARA, RRG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1939, 800.2. In fact, because Prchala served as one of three top officials in the regional government, Kennan reported that he could always be outvoted in matters of any significance. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 62.

ridden bunch of hill-people...they wished for nothing except that people should leave them alone,” wrote Kennan. Of its future, Kennan guessed that “the unwieldy remnant of what was once Ruthenia will find its way back to the economic and political unit in which it most natural belongs, which is Hungary.”⁸⁷

Naturally, after two days of “poking around,” it was a kindly Czech general who offered Kennan a ride back to Prague. As if no man during this time should have been able to travel to Ruthenia without repercussions, Kennan’s return trip consisted of days without eating, cars breaking down, freezing drives through sinuous, icy mountain roads, and a bout with some strong drink which, after keeping him in bed for two days, left Kennan with a “humble deference to the powers of Serbian liquor.”⁸⁸

By mid-January, both Kennan and Carr had returned to the legation in Prague. Soon after, on January 19, the legation reported that Chvalkovsky’s long-awaited visit to Berlin had at last been determined for a few days later. Hitler had delayed the meeting for months, presumably because Prague had not aligned its policies to those of Berlin on a number of issues.⁸⁹ One of them was the military, something that left a stark impression on American observers. Already beaten down and demoralized from its capitulation at Munich, the Czech Army, at least from the legation’s point of view, posed zero threat to its German neighbor. Still, the Germans insisted that Prague reduce the military further, which would have meant disposing of thousands of Czech officers, throwing them out on the street without regard for how they would earn a living. “No responsible Czech government could do this,” thought Kennan.⁹⁰ As Carr explained to the

⁸⁷ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 74.

⁸⁸ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 28-29.

⁸⁹ Cox to Hull, January 19, one. p.m., NARA, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1910. According to Cox, Czechoslovakia’s military higher command was composed mostly of former members of the infamous Legion who, though politically moderate, were also “faithful to the Masaryk traditions.”

⁹⁰ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 22.

department, most Czech officers and generals were faithful to Masaryk's legacy, political moderates, and distrustful of the Germans. When news got around that Berlin planned to use Czech soldiers in foreign exploits, as well as its intention to post German military personnel in the Czech lands indefinitely, alarm among the Czech military rose dramatically.⁹¹ Carr, Kennan, and Cox believed that Germany would view the Czech military as sabotaging their plans for Bohemia and Moravia. Their muted, concluding statement, which suggested that Chvalkovsky's upcoming visit to Berlin might "possibly" provide clarification, indicated very little optimism for the situation ending well. Few Czech officials held high hopes for the meeting, either. In a discussion with Minister of Agriculture, Ladislav Fierabend, Carr inquired whether Chvalkovsky would ask Hitler for concessions on territory the Germans had taken from the Czechs. Fierabend smiled, shook his head, and reminded Carr that the Germans were not ones to give up what they come to possess.⁹²

As anticipated, the meeting did not go well. Hitler gave one of his brutal venting sessions, full of demands, complaints, and diatribes. On January 25, Carr discussed the meeting with Chvalkovsky, the latter having just returned from Berlin. According to Carr, Chvalkovsky looked "worn and dispirited."⁹³ The fever he had been fighting was partly to blame, wrote Carr, but close contact with Hitler and his incessant pressure did no favors, either. During the Hitler-Chvalkovsky meeting, the Fuhrer managed to deride Prague's handling of "the Jews, the press, the army, and the German minority," but he was most consumed with the Jewish problem. He wanted all removed from Czecho-Slovakia. Chvalkovsky countered that such a request was

⁹¹ Cox to Hull, January 19, 1939, one a.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1910. Most Czech officers traced their service back to their time in the Czech Legion, which was instrumental in the establishment of Czechoslovakia's First Republic, increasing their connection and loyalty to the First Republic's president-liberator, Masaryk.

⁹² Carr, untitled notes, December 11, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Prague, 1939, 800.

⁹³ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 97.

impossible, to which Hitler explained that “if the Jewish question were not settled to Germany’s satisfaction Czechoslovakia would have to abide by the consequences.”⁹⁴ Carr finished his report noting, with interest, that upon Chvalkovsky’s return, noticeable changes in the government’s approach took place immediately. Communist labor unions were suppressed and newspapers with tinges of pro-Benes leanings were heavily censored.

The most contentious issue arising out of the Hitler-Chvalkovsky meeting was that of the Jews, and no issue more fully demonstrated the difficulties inherent to Czecho-Slovakia, Czech-German relations, and Czech-American relations in the months leading up to the occupation. In Bohemia and Moravia, state-sponsored anti-Semitism did not flourish in the months following Munich. (That being said, the diktat, along with the resignation of the Benes government, did lead to “Jew baiting, gutter demagogy, and petty chauvinism” among portions of the populace and press.⁹⁵) Though Hitler demanded that Prague unleash harsh anti-Semitic measures, the Czechs responded with “stubborn resistance.”⁹⁶ Even when laws and legislation levied burdens on the Jewish population, such as Syrový’s refusal to allow Sudeten Jews to migrate to the heart of the state following Munich, they were carried out with leniency, and Czech officials, for the

⁹⁴ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 7, January 26, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1911. According to Carr, Hitler told Chvalkovsky that he wanted every Jew driven out of Germany, and that Czechoslovakia, “if it wished to show its loyalty to Germany and establish proper relations with [Berlin], should pursue a like course.” The question of Czechoslovakia’s treatment of the Jews is up for debate. At the time, Carr wrote that “no drastic measures [have] been taken against the Jews.”

⁹⁵ Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 77.

⁹⁶ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 36. While it is true that the Prague government tried to ward off state-sponsored persecution of the Jews, the post-Munich period did see a rise in anti-Semitism among certain groups. In its annual report, the *American Jewish Year Book* reported how many arms of the Czech press initiated anti-Jewish campaigns. Physicians, lawyers, authors, journalists, actors, and other professions instituted “Aryan clauses” to bar Jews from practicing. The Second Republic’s main political party, the Party of National Unity, excluded Jews from membership. Moses Moskowitz, “Czechoslovakia,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 41 (1939): 271-272.

most part, made sure to implement them only when doing so caused no immediate danger to the Jews in question.⁹⁷

After Chvalkovsky and Beran took over, both of whom who were far less devoted to Masaryk's legacy of equity and far more devoted to German rapprochement given the times, the Prague government continued to oppose wholesale anti-Semitism, although it did enact laws to make it increasingly difficult for Jewish refugees to stay and work in the Czech lands.⁹⁸ Practically speaking, Chvalkovsky, Beran, and Hacha were in an untenable position.⁹⁹ While promising Hitler to destroy Jewish influence without delay, they simultaneously promised the United States and Britain that they would protect its Jews. Chvalkovsky confidently told Kennan that Prague would never be able to treat its Jews as Berlin. Most Czech Jews lived in bigger cities where intermarriage was common and where many Jews held prominent positions in business and industry.¹⁰⁰

Prague's desire to not give-in to German pressure on Jews was an important pillar in the maintenance of sturdy relations between America and the Czech lands. Throughout the 1930s, public opinion in the United States had gradually become more attuned to the plights of Jews in Germany, and after Nuremberg, put more pressure on elected officials to respond. Germany's massive anti-Jew pogrom of November 9 and 10, Kristallnacht, marked a significant uptick in America's perception of Germany and the Jewish problem: "The wholesale confiscations, the atrocities, the increasing attacks...have aroused opinion here to a point where if something is not

⁹⁷ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 54.

⁹⁸ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 81.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Kennan, "Prague—Munich to Occupation," 23 and Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 37 and 44. According to Kennan, Jews in the Czech lands often fared okay because in Bohemia and Moravia, "nationality is a matter of language rather than blood...such resentment of the Jews as exists in Bohemia thus centers largely on the German-speaking Jews—particularly those who have come to Bohemia since the war."

done there will be combustion,” said Moffat.¹⁰¹ On November 15, Roosevelt issued a statement in which he expressed the deep shock of the American people at what had taken place in Germany. He added one line purely his own, saying, “I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization.” The papers lauded the response for its forcefulness and clear condemnation.¹⁰² After much discussion, the department also decided to call home Hugh Wilson, ambassador to Berlin, for “consultation.” “No one has any illusions that it will stop the Germans in their tracks,” wrote Moffat, “but it is a gesture that enables us to save our self-respect.”¹⁰³

American efforts to execute a significant response to Europe’s Jewish problem failed. The Intergovernmental Committee had slammed into a concrete wall in trying to secure safe emigration for Germany’s Jews, preventing it from addressing Czech Jews, or the Jews of any other country for that matter. Because of this, Poland’s minister in Washington, George Potocki, had a perpetual bad temper, voicing his frustrations over the department’s refugee policy with anyone who dared to listen. Potocki and the Poles were upset that the Intergovernmental Committee spent all its time try to resettle German Jews even though the Germans were

¹⁰¹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 14, 1939, 1.

¹⁰² Bertram Hulen, “Statement Sharp,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1938, 1. In part Hulen’s column read, “It was difficult to conceive of a more forceful expression of this country’s displeasure short of severing diplomatic relations.”

¹⁰³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 15, 1938, 1. The State Department was dealing with a very fine line in responding to Kristallnacht. On the one hand, it did not want to be behind public opinion in expressing outrage at Germany’s atrocious behavior. On the other hand, it did not want to completely upend U.S.-German relations, or even negatively impact them in any significant way. Ultimately, it decided that calling Wilson home would satisfy both criteria. Messersmith to Hull, November 14, 1938, no. 1077-00, Box 10, Folder 69, Messersmith Papers, 1-2. The Germans returned the favor a few days later, recalling Hans Dieckhoff, German ambassador to the United States, also for “consultations.” No German ambassador returned to Washington until after the war. The department chose to respond to Berlin’s move by issuing a “cold and cryptic” statement, not wanting to completely burn bridges at that point. Moffat, November 18, 1938, 1.

behaving so despicably. This was unfair, argued Potocki, because the Poles also wanted to get rid of their Jews, but they at least treated their them decently.¹⁰⁴

Another effort by the government was the nascent Wagner-Rogers Bill, which would have raised America's immigration quotas to allow 20,000 children, mostly Jews, into the country. The bill was doomed from the start, though, as most officials, whether from Congress, the department, or the administration, feared setting a precedent of changing immigration quotas. Interestingly, one of the bill's sponsors, Representative Edith Rogers, admitted to Moffat that she only introduced the bill because she feared that something more extreme might find its way into committee. Moffat flatly opposed the Wagner-Rogers Bill, feeling it would open the Pandora's box on immigration.¹⁰⁵

Despite Washington's failures in specifically addressing the Jewish refugee crisis in Cecho-Slovakia, it remained an important point in U.S.-Czech relations. A few weeks after Kristallnacht, Carr brought up the Jewish question with Chvalkovsky. Carr, Kennan, and others at the Schonborn had dealt personally with the Jewish refugee problem. During a two-week stretch in November, the U.S. Consulate General received over 5,000 visitors requesting visas, the vast majority from Jews.¹⁰⁶ Carr informed the foreign minister of his personal apprehension over the Prague government's future plans for the Jewish population. Germany's laws, clauses, and pogroms had "aroused intense felling" in the United States, said Carr, and if Prague were to do likewise, the consequences would be regrettable.¹⁰⁷ Carr reminded Chvalkovsky that

¹⁰⁴ Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 18, 1938, 2. Moffat could not help but understand Potocki's argument as being like "paying the watchman not to kick your dog." Potocki continued to press Moffat, as well as Myron Taylor and George Messersmith. Frustrated with being stonewalled, Potocki claimed that by limiting its work to solely German Jews, the committee was putting a premium on the mistreatment of Jews elsewhere. Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 19-20, 1938, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Moffat, diplomatic journal, February 13, 1939, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 84.

¹⁰⁷ Carr to Hull, "Minister's Conversation with the Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Chvalkovsky," no. 307, December 29, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1938, 800, 5-6.

Americans, both the citizenry and the government, had great sympathy and “a very friendly feeling” toward Czecho-Slovakia. Anti-Semitic measures handed down by Prague would severely impair that goodwill. Chvalkovsky agreed with Carr’s statements, adding that he intended to avoid taking harsh measures at almost any cost, and that only by “virtual orders of Berlin” would such measures ever come about.¹⁰⁸

Chvalkovsky’s assurances aside, not all word coming from Czech circles indicated the same level of commitment to just treatment of the Jews. For instance, John C. Wiley, minister to the Baltic states, reported in January conversations he had had with the Czechoslovak minister in Riga, Pavel Baracek. According to Wiley, Baracek, who had no trouble saying that the Poles and Hungarians were behaving quite “stupidly,” felt that the Germans were acting in a very conciliatory manner, and he did not sense any great amount of persecution coming. Wiley brought up the increasingly anti-Semitic disposition that both the government and populace had taken, a thought which Baracek did not feel passed muster. “The Jews had a disproportionately large share of the learned professions,” argued Baracek, who continued by saying that “anti-Semitism was an old state of affairs in Czechoslovakia.”¹⁰⁹

The period following Chvalkovsky’s January visit with Hitler marked an important juncture. The Czech government, surprisingly, did not make any great changes to its policy toward Jews. In mid-February, Kennan produced a long report for the department, claiming that “very little has happened in Prague thus far to justify the panicky atmosphere which has prevailed in Jewish circles.” While the government did pass two pieces of legislation negatively impacting Jews’ naturalization rights, officials carried out the laws with a generous disposition,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Wiley to Hull, telegram no. 130, January 9, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1912. Wiley noted that Baracek had been a prominent figure in Czechoslovakia’s independence movement and was well-known for his “patriotic sentiments and devotion.”

and Kennan anticipated that it would not affect more than 20,000 or 30,000 individuals. Furthermore, the Czechs had taken steps to provide great assistance to emigrating Jews, namely because French and British aid depended on it. Overall, Kennan reiterated the difficult position Prague found itself in, “torn between the conflicting desires of the Germans and the Western powers, with their own instincts inclining them toward moderation.”¹¹⁰ What made the period crucial was Germany’s explicit dissatisfaction with Prague, which it expressed by becoming increasingly active in the Czech lands. For one thing, propaganda increased to a fever pitch, as Ernst Kundt, the leader of the German minority in Bohemia and Moravia, rallied willing listeners with anti-Jew manifestos.¹¹¹

Jews fared much worse in Slovakia, and as a result, the province received much less favorable consideration from American observers and officials.¹¹² In Kennan’s words, Slovak anti-Semitism was “deep-seated.” Jews in Slovakia were generally more successful than their Slovak neighbors, which Kennan attributed to superior intelligence, but the Slovaks saw it as proof that the Jews sided with Bratislava’s enemies: Poland and Hungary. After achieving progressive levels of autonomy following Munich, Slovakia’s leaders, Tiso, Tuka, and Mach, launched strong attacks against the Jews.¹¹³ Later, while Nazis and Germans ravaged Jewish communities during Kristallnacht, Gedye reported similar behaviors in Slovakia: “How many

¹¹⁰ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 46.

¹¹¹ Ernst Kundt was a Sudeten German who worked alongside Henlein during the Munich crisis. Berlin considered him an expert on Czechoslovak affairs, so Kundt remained in Prague after the diktat to lead the German remnant. Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 67. Kennan recorded one of Kundt’s publications to the department, which in part railed, “An unusual characteristic of Czechoslovakia is that the Jews have interfered after a fashion in the political issues between Germany and Czechoslovakia and steered Czech policy to a point where the situation became intolerable.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 46.

¹¹² While America’s cool attitude toward the Slovaks was more clearly borne out during spring and summer 1939, it began manifesting during the Second Republic. Beyond the legation’s less-than-favorable depictions of the Slovak leaders, there were other, more tangible actions. For instance, Slovakia’s regional government invited Kennan to Bratislava for the opening session of Parliament, to which Kennan replied with a formal ‘no.’ Kennan to Urad Propagandy Slovenskej Krajiny, January 16, 1938, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, 1939, 800.

¹¹³ Kennan recalled one Slovak minister promise that in various professions, “there would be no *numerus clausus*: there would be a *numerus nullus*.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 13.

Jews actually have been rounded up, with their property seized and they themselves dumped penniless...surely will run into the thousands.”¹¹⁴

After Slovakia’s mid-December elections, the regional government pursued harsher anti-Semitic measures into the new year, coated in a “vehement campaign in the press.”¹¹⁵ When travelling through Bratislava in January, Kennan had a personal conversation with Tiso, in which the prime minister stressed that his government would take whatever steps necessary in order to eliminate Jewish influences from Slovakia’s political and economic life. Kennan added that Tiso gave assurances that the Slovak government would avoid irresponsible excesses and physical cruelty, but Kennan took the remarks with a grain of salt: “I suspect that...the Slovak government will be governed primarily by considerations of expediency.”¹¹⁶ Worse yet, the Catholic church, which Carr and Kennan had anticipated would serve as a limiting factor to Slovakia’s anti-Jew viciousness, became sharply negative toward Jews, and by February, Kennan sensed that it no longer posed any hindrance to government policy. Interestingly, the only real factor necessitating a tinge of caution in Slovakia’s Jew policy was that of financial aid from the United States. Slovakia, ever poor, relied in part on capital that flowed from American-Slovak emigres, as well as general American business endeavors, and if Bratislava pushed too hard and too eagerly into Jew-baiting, their already precarious economic framework would suffer irreparably.¹¹⁷

Lastly, there was Ruthenia. Carr and Kennan often referred to the province as being, above all else, “obscure.” True to form, Ruthenia’s handling of its Jews was muddled and inconsistent. In their new year report on the Jewish situation, Carr and Kennan noted that the

¹¹⁴ G.E.R. Gedye, “New Slovak State Torn by Dissension,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1938, 6.

¹¹⁵ Moskowitz, “Czechoslovakia,” 274.

¹¹⁶ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 63; Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 52.

circumstances of Jews in Ruthenia was, of course, obscure. Though only twelve-percent of the population, Ruthenian Jews controlled ninety-five-percent of the region's economic output. Thus, between their small number and oversized influence, Ruthenian officials, who like the Slovaks distrusted the Jewish community, considered Jews "in some respects too much and in others too little of a problem" to tackle.¹¹⁸

One thread tying the Czech and eastern provinces together was that in both places, the Jewish question was largely "the football of foreign influences."¹¹⁹ It was primarily Berlin kicking the question around, using it to put pressure on the Czechs while luring the Slovaks further into a German orbit. In each their own ways, Bohemia-Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia attempted to consolidate their Jewish populations and anti-Semitic policies. Their distinct approaches had direct impact on their relations with the United States, for American public opinion, in addition to the consciences of State Department officials, expected fair treatment of the Jews. As shown, the Schonborn reported with sympathy the Czech position—one of being caught between a rock and a hard place—and even attempted to encourage moderation. With the Slovaks, the legation merely reported the troubling trends. There is no indication that Carr, Kennan, or others attempted to reason or dialogue about the issue. Lastly, Ruthenia remained an obscure, far-off, pitiable province, whose position toward the Jews was relegated to the question of when, not if, the Germans would determine its fate.

As the legation fleshed out the Jewish question in Czecho-Slovakia, America received Eduard Benes, former president of the former Czechoslovakia, in New York on February 10. A few days prior, the *New York Times* ran a lengthy, glowing article on Benes—his character, career, and trials. "Of all the creators of Czecho-Slovakia, Benes was in Western eyes the

¹¹⁸ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 56.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

greatest after Masaryk himself,” wrote Clair Price. With “dignity and an unflinching fortitude...[an] iron nerve and an iron physique,” Benes had served Czechoslovakia, a “robust young democracy” for twenty years, and he was now being welcomed in America as both a “pillar of the League” and “the most tragic figure of the grim Munich drama.”¹²⁰ Fiorello La Guardia, New York City’s mayor, greeted Benes with stirring words, reminding his audience that

Four representatives of two decadent democracies and two violent dictatorships meeting at Munich decided that instead of politics they would perform common butchery. They laid a small, fettered State on their operating table and then with merciless treachery began to cut it up. Today we welcome the President of this State in New York. We assure him that we have not forgotten this act of butchery by the European Great Powers, that we value him according to his merits and that therefore here in the United States we will always assist his brave nation.¹²¹

Benes returned praise for the United States, calling it a “great and powerful bulwark,” and a place that represented “the perfect fighter who knows that life is sometimes difficult, but who knows also that in human life there should be no room for despair or pessimism.”¹²²

Before departing for America, Benes had determined to remain apolitical for the indefinite future. He figured it would do no good to his people, nor Hacha’s government, nor the United States, if he used his time in America to villainize the international situation. Until circumstances changed, which he anticipated would be sooner rather than later, he decided to keep quiet.¹²³ Thus, in light of La Guardia’s kind words, Benes limited his statements to further exaltations of his host country: “Personally, I have always been no only an admirer of your country and its history, but I have tried to follow your ideas and principles... The United States, with all its development, has been to me an example... for the whole world.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Clair Price, “A New Chapter in the Stirring Life of Benes,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1939, 2.

¹²¹ Eduard Benes, *The Memoirs of Eduard Benes: From Munich to New War and New Victory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), 61.

¹²² Price, “A New Chapter,” 2.

¹²³ Benes, *The Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 62.

¹²⁴ “Benes, Here, Holds Peace Is Possible,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1939, 11.

It was not long, however, before Benes realized that, even if he were to remain quiet on what transpired at Munich, and even if he were to hold his tongue on the conciliatory efforts of the new government in Prague, he could still use his time in America to buildup goodwill for a future Czechoslovak state. Like Masaryk of 1918, Benes sought to capture the magic of a U.S.-Czech ‘special bond’:

My wife and I visited the birthplaces or graves of George Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson, and wherever we went there were huge meetings and demonstrations at which not seldom ten, fifteen, even twenty thousand people took part. It was an immense work of propaganda for peace, democracy, and Czechoslovakia; against what had happened in Munich. Only then did I fully understand how great were the moral assets which the Republic had built up during the twenty years of our existence and during our fight for democracy in 1938 by our faith and fidelity to Masaryk’s democracy, our endeavor to save peace, our dignified attitude toward Germany and Nazism. I confess to have made the fullest use of these moral and political assets during my six months in North America.¹²⁵

Benes made headway in courting State Department officials, too. In mid-February, George Messersmith, assistant secretary of state, attended a dinner at which Benes spoke and answered questions. According to Messersmith, while the guests were already inclined to be sympathetic toward Benes personally, the former president still managed to make a “very deep impression.” “I think everyone was struck with the objectivity which he displayed, the apparent complete frankness of his replies and with extraordinarily lucid analyses he gave of the various aspects of the European problem,” recorded Messersmith.¹²⁶ What Messersmith found most interesting was Benes’ claim that he nor his Czechoslovak colleagues could have done anything to prevent Germany’s seizure of the Sudetenland, as it was truly not a matter of minorities, but the simple fact that Czechoslovakia was in Germany’s way. Now, Benes’ appeal to Messersmith is not surprising, considering Messersmith had long wanted to take a strong stand against

¹²⁵ Benes, *The Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 62.

¹²⁶ Messersmith to Hull, Memorandum, February 13, 1939, Box 10, Folder 74, Messersmith Papers, 1-7.

Germany.¹²⁷ Yet Benes' ability to use his time in the United States before the occupation—a time when he technically remained apolitical—to consolidate his standing in the eyes of the American public and government would prove important after the occupation. During the spring and summer, once Hitler had thrown off the charade of a limited foreign policy, Benes would begin establishing his government-in-exile in earnest. His efforts would further split America's understanding of who or what represented the Czechoslovak people, and further complicate the nature of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.

In February and early March, the Schonborn watched Czecho-Slovakia make its final attempts at consolidation before the occupation. The period reflected Central Europe's chaos, or what Kennan called the "powerful national and ideological currents" swirling around the Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenes.¹²⁸ The legation remained doubtful of the country's prospects. The Prague government, still without guarantees or international support, did its best to placate the Germans without alienating the West, but the Germans were driving a hard bargain, surprising no one. As March approached, Kundt was basically demanding that the Germans living in Czechoslovakia, who Berlin had prevented from moving to the Reich, receive a state within a state. According to an American correspondent, Chvalkovsky was displaying "skillful dilatory tactics," but sooner or later push would come to shove and the Czechs would either have to completely bend to Berlin's will or face the music of lost independence. Carr, Cox, and Kennan had been saying as much since the time of Chvalkovsky's visit.¹²⁹

In many instances, what worried Carr and Kennan was the lack of practical consolidation. During trips to border towns, both in Czechoslovakia and the Sudetenland, American observers

¹²⁷ In the words of Moffat, "Messersmith sees things only in black and white and is very intolerant of anyone who does not see eye to eye with him." Moffat, diplomatic journal, November 4, 1938, 4.

¹²⁸ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 27.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

could not help but notice the lack of permanency. All the types of projects that redrawn borders necessitated—such as custom houses and railway stations—were entirely absent. Kennan found that when he inquired to German officials about the missing effort to solidify the new borders, he received “knowing smiles” coupled with cryptic explanations that things would soon be changing.¹³⁰ In the east, Slovakia continued its border skirmishes with Hungary while remaining firmly entrenched in its self-delusion vis-à-vis Germany. What they did not know, though, was that by the end of January, Germany, after failing to secure concessions from Poland, had already determined his future course. Hitler was planning ignite Slovak autonomy as a means to neutralize Czecho-Slovakia and, ultimately, prepare a springboard for *Blitzkrieg* into Poland. That meant Ruthenia was expendable altogether. As Chust’s Ukrainians continued in their fantastic plans, Hitler prepared to heave the province to its two hungry neighbors, Budapest and Warsaw. The department was not unaware, for in mid-February, Biddle reported to the department information he had regarding Ribbentrop’s meeting with Beck. Among the crumbs of the conversation he gleaned was that, in Hitler’s eyes, the Czecho-Slovakia issue was far from settled and her boundaries were by no means definite.¹³¹ As mid-March approached, Central Europe trembled with uncertainty, caused in large part by the unshakable feeling that Hitler’s plans for Czechoslovakia were coming to a head.¹³²

Indicative of the department’s approach to Czecho-Slovakia during the Second Republic was the situation revolving around Hugh Wilson’s ambassadorial position in Berlin. As mentioned, Wilson had returned to Washington in the wake of Kristallnacht for “consultation,” but there was not set plan of action for the future of his post. By February, the department began

¹³⁰ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation, 20-21.

¹³¹ Ibid., 311.

¹³² Biddle, *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War*, 322.

having discussions about whether or not he should return to his post. Wilson was eager to resume his position. Messersmith was adamant that he not. That left Hull, Welles, Moffat, and others stuck in the middle. They saw benefits to both sides of the argument but felt it best to “let matters wait.”¹³³ Such was the approach of the department and the Schonborn toward the Second Republic on the whole. Without the desire or ability to be anything but a passive observer, American officials harbored a wait-and-see attitude, though a decidedly pessimistic one. By mid-March, the waiting would be over, and their pessimism would be justified. Hitler was coming.

¹³³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, February 15, 1939. Moffat figured it would be best to allow Roosevelt to make whatever decision he felt best.

Chapter Three: “Occupation”

The occupation of Prague was the real beginning of the second world war...the world could not remain silent anymore.¹

The first surprise to greet Prague on March 15, 1939 was an unseasonable blizzard. Dark sky, icy temperatures, and gusts of large snowflakes engulfed the early morning hours. As the populace slept, snow and ice covered the ancient city’s streets, and with spring being just around the corner, it was an unwelcome turn in the weather.

Yet if a storm had been the only surprise in the capital that morning, few of Prague’s citizens would have had much cause for complaint. Czecho-Slovakia had been teetering on the brink of inexistence for almost half-a-year, so its people certainly could have handled one more bout of bad, wintery weather. It did not take long, though, for the emergence of a second surprise, and one fully more miserable than the first. It came in the form of a giant “iron caterpillar” crawling powerfully toward the Hrad—a German invasion.² It was a shocking development for both the people and the government.³ By midday, Prague had completely succumbed to Nazi control. The rest of the Czech lands realized the same fate before the day was through. Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist.⁴

¹ Benes, *The Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 64.

² Alice Masaryk, *Alice Garrigue Masaryk, 1879-1966: Her Life as Recorded in Her Own Words and by Her Friends*, eds. Ruth Mitchell & Linda Vlasak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1980), 162-163.

³ Due to strict censorship, the Czech people were wholly unaware of how desperate their country’s situation had become. The Prague government, and particularly Minister Chvalkovsky, had diluted itself into thinking optimistically about its prospects for the future, even up through March 14.

⁴ Determining which designation to use for the Czech lands is difficult. Technically speaking, by November 1938 Czechoslovakia had become Czecho-Slovakia in order to reflect Slovakia’s increased autonomy and the more fully federalized state. On March 14, and as a result of Slovakia’s declared independence and Prague’s acquiescence, the term Czecho-Slovakia had become obsolete as well. Thus, Hitler’s occupation was of the purely Czech lands, often referred to as the Historic Lands, or simply as Bohemia-Moravia. It would be most accurate, then, to say that what ceased to exist on March 15 was the independence of Bohemia and Moravia. However, Western circles, and for the purposes of this study American circles, continued to use Czechoslovakia and Czecho-Slovakia interchangeably. For many Americans, the predominantly Czech government in Prague *was* Czechoslovakia, and so it remained Czechoslovakia even into 1939. Because the events of mid-March 1939 occurred with such rapidity, American observers had little time to acknowledge the ‘independence’ of Slovakia,

For U.S.-Czech relations, the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia was a final, crystalized picture of just how impotent their underlying friendliness had become. Throughout the Second Republic, the legation, as well as Washington, watched and reported passively as Czecho-Slovakia's central government struggled, and ultimately failed, to consolidate its post-Munich position. Yet for all the difficulties it faced between Munich and March 1939, Czecho-Slovakia remained. "If this is the death struggle of democracy," wrote Kennan to a friend in early 1939, "it can at least be said that democracy is dying hard."⁵ And as Prague attempted to navigate the absurdly thin line between appeasing Hitler and satisfying the democracies (as well as its own conscience), the Schonborn and State Department watched sympathetically, expressing admiration and goodwill for the Czechs, while acknowledging the mutinous movements taking place in Slovakia and Ruthenia.

Thus, for all that had happened in the five months after Munich, Washington and Prague remained on friendly terms. Consequently, when Czecho-Slovakia heaved its dying breaths in March 1939, the Schonborn retained its unique position as a wholly sympathetic, wholly friendly, but wholly impotent listening post.⁶ The chaos that had been unleashed at Munich, and which had ebbed and flowed in the months after, came to a screeching climax in Hitler's invasion, and the American legation could do little but make its best effort to keep pace with the details. Given the chaos, the Schonborn performed its responsibilities quite well. Still, the utter complexity and convolution of the crisis prevented Carr and his team from developing proactive,

instead viewing the occupation as the tragic end to the 'Czechoslovakia' of old. For consistency's sake, the hyphenated 'Czecho-Slovakia' is used throughout the remainder of the chapter.

⁵ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 10.

⁶ When the department first announced Carr's assignment to Prague in July 1937, Hull called Prague one of the continent's "most vital listening posts." At the time, the Czechs took this comment to heart, but it began to ring hollow as the region's crises grew. "Carr Transferred in Hull 'Shake-Up,'" July 3, 1937, *New York Times*, 13.

penetrating analysis, and when the crisis finally came to its dramatic peak—a full German occupation—nearly everyone was caught by surprise.

In this way, then, Carr and his staff proved unable to leverage America's unique position vis-à-vis Czecho-Slovakia into something practically beneficial. What was its unique position? First, unlike the other major democracies, Britain and France, America had no fear of being engulfed in a European conflict. While it is true that Roosevelt and the State Department were looking for ways to strengthen the country's international position, especially its ability to aid friendly powers in the event of war, public opinion remained firmly opposed to serious involvement in any European conflict.⁷ Second, it had emerged from Munich's aftermath as the last democracy of sizable power still on good terms with Prague. During the difficult months following Munich, America remained a trustworthy and sympathetic, if aloof, friend to the Czechs. But precisely because its aloofness was justifiable, Prague did not expect Washington to underwrite its security. For that Prague still looked to the Munich powers and their unfulfilled promises of guaranteed frontiers.⁸ In light of such facts, the American legation had every freedom to recognize the cold, hard realities of the enveloping crisis but it proved unable to move beyond standard reporting of events, or beyond reiterating the bewildered, distressed, and apathetic thoughts from officials in Prague, London, Paris, and elsewhere. For those working from the department, then, Carr and the legation staff had been "caught napping."⁹

⁷ In polls conducted in summer 1939, *after* the events of the occupation, public opinion remained firm. In response to the Roper poll question, "Should we tend strictly to our own business and go to war only to defend our own country from attack?" 85-88% answered 'Yes.' At the same time, other polls also indicate that there were strong anti-Nazi sentiments in the United States. Adam Berinsky, "American Public Opinion and World War II," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 15.

⁸ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 100. Although Chvalkovsky had become less concerned with the guarantees following his disastrous meeting with Hitler in mid-January, efforts to secure permanency to Czecho-Slovakia's borders—the reason for the guarantees in the first place—continued in earnest.

⁹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 15, 1939.

While Prague's circumstances had been deteriorating ever since the new year, and particularly since Chvalkovsky's January trip to Berlin, the immediate crisis that led to Hitler's decision for a March 15 occupation unfolded in the preceding week. It was a fast-paced, muddled, and sensational week. Within those few days there were many signs pointing to the fact that Czechoslovakia's independence was in grave danger, and such signs did not go unnoticed by interested observers in the West. Even so, the full occupation came as a surprise to the democracies, and next to nothing was done as it happened. In the case of France and England, it was for largely understandable, though awfully unheroic, reasons that they indulged in what could be called willful naivety.¹⁰ Paris and London had the most to lose if a continental war were to break out, and thus recognizing the roiling crisis for what it was—Hitler's effort to eliminate Czechoslovakia—would have forced them to play a bigger role in the Czech-German issue than they felt they capable. Instead they remained as removed as possible, granting Hitler de facto control over the region.¹¹ As during the Second Republic, those at the Schonborn as well as in Washington were not happy seeing Germany dig its heels into central Europe, but they also did not want to sour relations with Paris and London.¹² The result was a tendency among American officials to view France and Britain's willful negligence with great understanding.

Close analysis of America's efforts during the March crisis thus becomes an interesting and instructive case study, and one that has not yet been fully explored.¹³ A detailed account of

¹⁰ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 476, section 1, March 14, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/624; Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 477, sections 1-2, March 14, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/625.

¹¹ Elmer Davis, "What Britain is Worth," *The Manchester Guardian*, March 6, 1939, 9.

¹² Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 594. Hull speaks to the State Department's efforts to limit its criticism of Chamberlain and Daladier often, even though it often disagreed with London and Paris's policies.

¹³ Studies that address U.S.-Czech relations during and after the March crisis are generally cursory or treated as epilogues. See Baker, "The United States and the Czechoslovak Crisis," 1938-1939," 209-215; Murphy, "Initiative Help: United States-Czechoslovak Relations from Versailles to Munich," 604-616. For studies that examine the March crisis from the perspective of a specific American, see Gaddis, *George Kennan: A Life* 120-131; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*, 182-198; and Katharine Crane, *Mr. Carr*

the narrative shows the manner in which America's diplomats in Prague struggled to navigate the complexities of central Europe during the lingering Czech-German crises. Confronted with confusion, false hope, and misinformation coming from all directions—Prague, Berlin, Bratislava, Budapest, Rome, Warsaw, London, and Paris—American officials could do little but watch as Germany made a mockery of Czechoslovakia before eliminating her altogether. It was a pitiful period for the government in Prague, and America's inability to do anything but observe serves as a useful reflection of prewar U.S.-Czech relations. That being said, it would be incorrect to call this a U.S. failure. The events were too big, and with too much of their own momentum, for any substantial blame to be mounted against America's passivity and ignorance. Rather, the period showcases the reality that shared values and friendly relations can only go so far, especially when confronted with much stronger external threats. If Hitler made a mockery of Czecho-Slovakia through his occupation, he also exposed the standard impotence of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.

Lastly, the March crisis turned out to be the very end of Carr's diplomatic service. Within a week of the occupation, Carr would begin the process of shutting down the embassy, one final task before his long-earned retirement. Interestingly, Carr's last few dispatches to the Department signaled a break in his typically formal, official, and straightforward reporting.¹⁴ With his time in Prague nearing its end, he at last felt able to shake the confines of protocol and express his deep seeded concerns for the Czech people, and his hope that the U.S. government would take specific, humanitarian actions in the lands belonging to the former Czechoslovak

of State, 343-354; For detailed accounts of the March crisis from an international perspective, see Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); For the German perspective, see Gerhard Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy 1933-1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2005); For the Czech perspective see Prochazka, *The Second Republic*; and Ripka, *Munich: Before and After*, 352-409.

¹⁴ Carr to Hull, March 19, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, vol. I, 49-50.

Republic. Similarly, the department itself was able to take more proactive measures in expressing support for the Czech people and its ousted officials. After the occupation, Hitler had lost all credibility, and it was finally safe for the United States to show partiality without the repercussions that came from ‘getting involved.’ From a similar but broader perspective, the occupation proved to be a great turning point for international foreign policy, for it exposed Hitler as being an untrustworthy ‘Napoleon,’ convincing even the most stubborn man that a new war was indeed coming.¹⁵

The immediate crisis surrounding the March 15 occupation hinged on the precarious state of Czech-Slovak-German relations. Ever since the Zilina meeting of October 6, separatists exercised substantial sway within Slovak political circles. Sensing an opportunity to create havoc, Ribbentrop began luring these extremists into Germany’s orbit in February 1939.¹⁶ Like flies to a zapper, Bratislava eagerly sent representatives to meet with German emissaries in Berlin and Vienna. Though the meetings were presumably centered on financial matters, Kennan and Carr suspected that ulterior motives were at play, and that Slovakia probably hoped to impress upon Prague that it had “powerful friends” elsewhere.¹⁷ The legation had less to say about what Berlin’s ulterior motives might be. Little clarity came a few days later when Carr spoke at length with Chvalkovsky. Their conversation revealed the foreign minister’s confidence that Hitler had no intention of prodding Slovakia’s independence movement.¹⁸ For the time

¹⁵ In the days following the occupation, newspapers wasted no time in drawing comparisons between Hitler and Napoleon. One American observer wrote soon after the occupation that “Some persons may argue that Napoleon was greater than Hitler and that the comparison is strained. It is not, for the danger is even greater now.” P.J. Philip, “What Is Hitler Up To? A Frantic Europe Asks,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1939, 66.

¹⁶ For a succinct, chronological account of the developing Berlin-Bratislava talks, see Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 117-122.

¹⁷ Carr to Hull, “Slovak-Czech Relations,” no. 345, March 9, 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague, vol. III, 1939, 800-Slovakia, 3.

¹⁸ Carr, untitled notes on conversation with Chvalkovsky, March 9, 1939, NARA, RG 84, correspondence file, Prague, 1939, vol. III, 800-Slovakia. Chvalkovsky’s optimism was grounded in the sober conclusion that if Hitler really wanted Czechoslovakia separated or absorbed, he could do so without resorting to indirect means.

being, the American legation found no reason to seriously question the faith Chvalkovsky was placing in Germany, suggesting in its March 9 report that Berlin and Bratislava were probably both bluffing.¹⁹ The real question was whether the central government in Prague would call their bluffs by taking direct action against its mutinous eastern province.

To those at the Schonborn, the growing wariness of Czech officials toward Bratislava indicated that Prague, if pushed far enough, might intervene in Slovakia. Then, in the first week of March, the American legation reported that Czech-Slovak relations, already tenuous, were strained to the utmost when regional officials met to discuss the state's finances. Slovakia, woefully poor and utterly dependent on the Czechs to maintain its precious autonomy, defied the limits of shame and demanded that Prague reduce its share of the federal budget while allowing it to use Czech funds with "no strings attached."²⁰ Over the next few days, the standoff ebbed and flowed, with moderate and extreme elements within the Slovak delegation vying for control.²¹

The situation reached a tipping point when Prague learned that top Slovak officials, particularly Premier Tiso, had orchestrated double dealings with Reich officials. Prague, wanting to put Slovakia in its place, tried to sound out Berlin, desperate to know whether Hitler would allow it to take decisive action against Slovakia. By March 9, Kennan, aided by word he had received from the Polish legation, was reporting that forces within Berlin were pressuring Slovakia to pursue secession, yet Chvalkovsky remained optimistic that this was not the case.²²

¹⁹ Carr to Hull, "Slovak-Czech Relations," 4.

²⁰ By March 1939 the Slovaks were running a deficit of roughly 1,155,315,600 crowns. Worse still, Kennan noted that the Slovaks had the unfortunate tendency of using Czech funds, which were specifically allocated for administrative and economic improvement, for extensive propaganda programs. Carr to Hull, "Slovak-Czech Relations," no. 345, March 9, 1939, 1, NARA, RG 84, correspondence file, Prague, vol. III, 1939, 800-Slovakia.

²¹ Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 75.

²² Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 351. Carr also wrote the Department describing Warsaw's concerns, saying that "I feel that I should add that the view of the situation as outlined by the Foreign Minister above differs greatly from that of the Polish... [who say] that Berlin is in fact giving vigorous support to the Slovak 'secessionist' policy." The

Naturally, Berlin put up a façade of ambivalence, and on March 9 Prague chose to gamble and dismiss Premier Tiso and top Slovak officials in one fell swoop. On March 10, the legation's press reports, as well as its cable to the Department, emphasized the orderliness with which Prague took action, and that "the changes have eliminated most of the people who were actively furthering a separatist movement."²³

As the Czech-German-Slovak political drama progressed, the American legation struggled to ascertain Hitler's intentions toward the Czechs in relation to broader foreign policy goals. Press reports and offhand rumors presented an endless number conjectures, making it difficult for the Department to sift through all of the hot air to locate substance.²⁴ In the days just prior to March 15, Carr sent word to the Department that increasing numbers of clashes between Czechs and Germans were taking place, especially in cities which had retained mixed populations after Munich, such as Brno.²⁵ He called the reaction of the German government "uncertain," but telegrams coming from Berlin pointed to Goebbels' propaganda machine and its "unbridled violence" against the Czechs, suggesting that German aggression was just around the

moderate elements of the Slovak party met with Polish leaders twice during the crisis to gauge what Warsaw's attitude would be if Slovakia were to declare its independence. Neither the moderate elements nor Poland wanted an independent Slovakia to fall into Berlin's orbit. Unsurprisingly, the Bratislava-Warsaw talks only heightened Berlin's pressure on Slovak extremists to pursue independence grounded in Reich protection. See Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 119.

²³ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 18, March 10, 1939, NARA, RG 84, correspondence file, Prague, vol. III, 1939, 800-Slovakia. Prague's central government, in conjunction with its reshuffling of the Slovak cabinet, also sent Czech forces into Slovakia on March 10. According to Major Lowell Riley, the U.S. Military Attaché, the Czechs declared martial law in Bratislava and made numerous arrests throughout the region. Still, on the whole, "the government appears to have the internal situation pretty well in hand." Major Lowell Riley, "Czecho-Slovakia, Comments on Current Events, No. 6," report no. P-1175, March 14, 1939, 2, NARA, RG 165, Correspondence 1917-41, Box 1426.

²⁴ For instance, Raymond Geist reported rumors from Berlin that Hitler would intervene in Czecho-Slovakia as a means to prevent a common Polish-Hungarian border through Ruthenia. When Hitler did occupy Prague on the 15th, he in fact showed *no* concern for Hungary's annexation of Ruthenia and its resulting shared border with Poland. Geist to Hull, telegram no. 163, March 11, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/601.

²⁵ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 21, March 13, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, 760F.62/1932.

corner.²⁶ Kennan and Major Riley, who were away on a ski trip in the Sudetenland, knew problems were brewing in Prague after seeing newspaper headlines with statements like, “Czechoslovakia in Uproar—Unprecedented Persecution of Germans.”²⁷ Considering the fact that the Germans still residing in Czech lands now lived “off the fat of the land,” the headlines were clearly masking Germany’s ulterior motives, so Kennan and Riley raced back to Prague. When reentering the city, the two received a rude surprise: “For the first time,” Kennan later recalled, “swastika flags were flying from some of the Prague windows.”²⁸

Throughout the Second Republic, American officials had a difficult time deciding whether Czechoslovakia’s two ongoing crises—the Slovak independence movement and Germany’s vehement press campaign—intersected. By the second week of March, connections between Berlin and Bratislava had become quite clear. For instance, upon being sacked by the central government, some of the Slovak separatists escaped to Vienna where they continued their campaign for independence with the help of Austrian Nazis.²⁹ The knowledge that Slovakia’s ousted radical elements were meeting with radical Nazis was bad enough, but the situation worsened in the ensuing days when the Wehrmacht began moving troops into strategic positions. On March 11 and 12, Major Riley, along with the military attachés from other governments, reported German troop concentrations on the frontiers of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Both the German and Czech governments claimed they were celebratory measures since March 12

²⁶ Geist to Hull, telegram no. 167, March 14, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, see 860F.00/618. Carr also reported Germany’s unrelenting press campaign, though in relation to the Slovak separatist movement. Carr to Hull, telegram no. 19, March 12, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/604.

²⁷ Kennan, “Prague—Munich to Occupation,” 42.

²⁸ George Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 81.

²⁹ Most notably was Ferdinand Durcansky, who before his ousting served as the Slovak Minister of Transport. Ripka, *Munich*, 367.

marked the one-year anniversary of the Anschluss, but Riley noted the pessimistic outlook among Czech military officers.³⁰

By March 13, some American officials saw the growing imbroglio as potential pretext for Nazi intervention in the rump state. What exactly this ‘intervention’ would look like was anybody’s guess. That evening, Raymond Geist, the American chargé in Berlin, reported that Tiso, who had been ousted on March 9, was having meetings with Ribbentrop in the German capital.³¹ Within his report, Geist made it clear that, from his point-of-view, the Germans looked ready to intervene in a serious manner. Tiso’s visit to the Reich chancellery confused the American legation in Prague, which found the developments wholly “disconcerting.” Yet while the signs pointed toward Germany’s active role in creating a Czech internal crisis, the legation retained its wait-and-see mindset. Kennan later recalled that “no one understood at that time that a trap was being prepared which was designed to bring about the end of Czechoslovakia.”³²

Carr, despite his concerns about Czecho-Slovakia’s internal turmoil, and having recognized the fact that Germany was actively “sympathetic” toward Slovakia’s separatist movement, still felt correct in assuaging the department that the situation held no probability of serious trouble on the afternoon of March 13.³³ Carr spoke again of Chvalkovsky’s optimistic outlook, feeling that with the new Slovak government having been established, order and calm

³⁰ Riley, “German Army Occupation of Czechoslovakia 15 March, 1939,” report no. P-1183, March 20, 1939, pg. 1, NARA, RG 165, correspondence 1917-41, box no. 1704. Some Czech officers even admitted that Hitler would probably invade Bohemia.

³¹ Geist reported at six p.m. that Tiso had arrived an hour earlier and had been accorded military honors in Berlin. According to Geist, “indications here are that the Germans have decided to intervene in the Czechoslovak crisis.” Geist to Hull, telegram no. 165, March 13, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm T1243, roll 31, see 860f.00/607. From Paris, Bullitt reported word that the Slovak issue had been “created deliberately by the Germans.” Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 470, March 13, 1939, NARA, RG b9, microfilm T1243, roll 31, see 860f.00/608.

³² Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 82.

³³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 14, 1939.

would prevail. The Czechoslovak minister was admittedly still preoccupied with Germany's attitude toward the developments, however.³⁴

The Kennans hosted a dinner party on the night of the 13th, and the evening's discussion centered on Slovakia, which everyone agreed would declare independence, and Ruthenia, which had become almost an afterthought. Late into the party Carr, who was not present, phoned Kennan to tell him that Hacha was planning to convene the Slovak Diet the following day.³⁵ Once his guests had departed, Kennan headed to the Schonborn to help with the telegraphing. In the early morning of March 14, a few hours after midnight, the staff cabled Washington the news.³⁶ It was expected that Slovakia would declare its independence.³⁷ Major Riley added that, since the Czechs had no mind to offer any resistance, German military operations, though not out of the question, were expected to be minimal. All this was happening behind the scenes of a populace largely unaware of the rapid developments: "Entire quiet prevails here," wrote Carr, adding that "the public is ignorant of what is going on."³⁸

Unfortunately, Prague's government was not faring much better than its ignorant citizenry, as they willingly admitted to the foreign offices of the democracies that they "simply

³⁴ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 21, March 13, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/606. Chvalkovsky was confident that Tiso's efforts had been "too weak" to succeed. Ironically, Chvalkovsky was not wholly incorrect, as Tiso did prove weak, just not in the way the minister had thought. Chvalkovsky considered Tiso too weak to rebuff Prague's damage control, when in reality he was too weak to rebuff Berlin's pressure.

³⁵ Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939 in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 82.

³⁶ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 22, March 14, 1939, two a.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/609.

³⁷ At the time of Carr's telegram (two a.m.), Tiso was wrapping up his talks with Ribbentrop and Hitler. The discussions, which had started a little after five p.m., March 13, began with Ribbentrop telling Tiso that Germany would merely watch Hungary invade Slovakia unless Bratislava declared its independence immediately. Then, at six-forty p.m., Tiso met with Hitler, who embarked on a bitter diatribe, first against the Czechs for their intolerable "Benes spirit," and then the Slovaks for their muddled, hesitant behavior. After telling Tiso that Germany had no need for Slovakia, Hitler concluded that the question of Slovak independence was "a question not of days but of hours." For detailed analysis of Tiso's talks in Berlin, see Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 124-126.

³⁸ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 22, March 14, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/609.

had no idea what to do.”³⁹ After sending all the necessary telegrams to the department, Kennan and Charles Elbrick, a secretary at the legation, walked home with feelings of “extreme uneasiness.”⁴⁰ Later, at noon, Carr informed the department that Germany had levied new demands on Prague, calling most notably for an independent Ruthenia and a Slovakia under German protection. The Slovak Diet was still in session, but their independence had become a forgone conclusion.⁴¹ Sure enough, the Slovak Diet declared its independence just prior to 12:30 p.m.

In the early afternoon, the Brazilian legation hosted a luncheon with Chvalkovksy as the guest of honor. Considering Prague’s position of dire straits, everyone was shocked to find Chvalkovsky arriving in a perfectly punctual manner, only to be further surprised as the foreign minister made his rounds with complete composure. Kennan considered it a “remarkable performance” for a man whose country had just lost one-half of itself.⁴² Chvalkovsky only stayed for the first course, however, and before evening he was on his way to meet with Hitler in Berlin where one needed all the composure in the world.

An hour later, the Prague legation relayed ominous signs to the Department. Hlinka guards were looting Czechs as they tried to leave Slovakia. German troops were mobilizing near Bratislava, only miles outside the Slovak border. Perhaps most troubling were the German troops mobilizing just north of Moravia. The legation staff thought it possible that Hitler intended to occupy German language enclaves in Brno, Jihlava, and Olomouc, thereby granting the Reich a

³⁹ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 475, March 14, 1939, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/617.

⁴⁰ Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 82.

⁴¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 23, March 14, 1939, noon, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/610. Carr phrased Germany’s three demands as: “(a) the independence of Ruthenia and Slovakia under some form of German protectorate; (b) a reconstruction of the Prague Government involving particularly the replacement of Syrový and of the Minister of the Interior Fischer; (c) further guarantees concerning the treatment of the German minority in Bohemia and Moravia.”

⁴² Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, pg. 84.

“fat corridor” between Austria and Silesia while using the “mutilated remnants of Bohemia-Moravia to preserve the fiction of an independent Czechoslovakia.”⁴³ At 2:00 p.m., Carr reported that the Czech General Staff, who by this time were “most pessimistic,” had resorted to saying things like “anything can happen, even a German march into Moravia and Bohemia.” Kennan, with his usual literary touch, wrote that Germany’s “propaganda table is being lavishly set, probably for another Czech meal.”⁴⁴ Worse yet, Bullitt’s sources in Paris informed him that Poland and Hungary would take Slovakia’s decision for independence as a signal to snatch Ruthenia, which would be securing its ‘independence’ along with Bratislava.⁴⁵ Skirmishes in Ruthene border towns were already being reported, and if Germany remained deferent, Warsaw and Budapest would at last have the common border they had long been pining for.

At three p.m. in Prague, Carr reported Slovakia’s declared independence with Tiso becoming both president and prime minister. Although Carr had received no word from the Czech cabinet, the tone of the radio broadcast suggested that no resistance was forthcoming.⁴⁶ As the dazed Czech cabinet scrambled to figure out what to do next, Geist reported on Germany’s heightened press campaign which, according to Geist, had become an unmistakable and deliberate buildup for “far reaching” intervention in Bohemia-Moravia. German editorials lamented the supposed chaos, persecution, and terror that Czech-Germans were subjected to, all

⁴³ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 24, March 14, 1939, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/611. In his message, Carr speaks of an “early occupation” of those German language enclaves. It is unclear as to whether he meant to imply that he expected a later occupation of the rest of the country. Subsequent telegrams suggest that while not being positive that a full occupation would take place, Carr anticipated major action from Berlin; Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 83.

⁴⁴ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 25, March 14, 1939, two p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/612.

⁴⁵ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 474, section 3, March 14, one p.m. 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/613. Bullitt was getting this information from the Polish ambassador in Paris, Juliusz Lukasiewicz.

⁴⁶ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 26, March 14, 1939, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/615. It is likely that the department had been aware of Slovakia’s proclaimed independence for a few hours. The Slovak Diet officially declared its independence just after noon, and Bratislava radio announced it publically at 12:25 p.m. Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 127.

because the Prague government refused to accept the terms of Munich. The *Bolkischer Beobachter* made sure to note that the problem went far deeper than Prague's government, arguing instead that "the poison comes from deep roots and has contaminated the whole Czech body. This means that Central Europe is faced by a great immediate danger. The situation has become untenable."

The German press's lies notwithstanding, some incidents of violence were in fact taking place, but mostly in Ruthenia. There, Czech troops, clashed with Ukrainian paramilitary groups in efforts to retain control over the region. Their control would be short-lived, however, as Hungarian troops entered Ruthenia on the morning of the 14th.⁴⁷ Not long after, the department received word from James Montgomery, American minister to Hungary, that Budapest had delivered an ultimatum to the Prague government demanding that the Czechs evacuate Ruthenia within twenty-four hours.⁴⁸ Carr informed the department of the same ultimatum soon after.⁴⁹ Though Hungary's army was incredibly weak, it had received blessing from both Rome and Berlin, with the latter all but demanding that Budapest take care of its Ruthene business immediately and quickly.⁵⁰ Poland, though eager for a common border with Hungary, was upset

⁴⁷ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 27, March 14, 1939, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1219, roll 14, 860F.00/620.

⁴⁸ John Flournoy Montgomery served as U.S. minister to Hungary from 1933-1941. His correspondence, both official and unofficial, serves as interesting counterweight to reports coming from Prague, as his perspectives carry greater measure of understanding for Budapest's behavior. It is another reminder that while America's diplomats served first and foremost to advance U.S. interests, they often did so through a lens that was sympathetic to the country in which they served. See John Montgomery, *Hungary: The Unwilling Satellite* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947) and Tibor Frank, *Discussing Hitler: Advisors of U.S. Diplomacy in Central Europe, 1934-1941* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 30, March 14, 1939, seven p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/630.

⁵⁰ Montgomery to Hull, telegram no. 47, March 14, 1939, seven p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/623. It was not until March 12 that Hitler reversed his approach and withdrew his "restraining hand" from Budapest. See Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 129-132. In regard to Rome's support of Hungary, see Phillips to Hull, telegram no. 87, March 14, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/621.

by the fact that Berlin had purposefully kept them in the dark. Rumania, Prague's impotent ally, watched warily as no one, particularly France and Britain, stood up to face the growing threats.⁵¹

At five p.m., Carr reported that Hacha and Chvalkovsky had left for Berlin at four. Details for the purpose of the visit were still murky, but what was clear was that Berlin had initiated its timing.⁵² By seven p.m., the crisis had devolved into an unmitigated disaster. Hacha and Chvalkovsky were en route to Berlin with the dismal task of pleading with Ribbentrop and Hitler for mercy, assuming they would get the chance to say anything. German troops were stacking up outside the Czech border.⁵³ Slovakia, the newly independent state, was expressing its gratitude toward Hitler. Hungary was occupying Ruthenia. In London and Paris, no one knew what to do, and no one could say with confidence what Hitler's plans were for the coming days, let alone hours. Bullitt reported conflicting views in Paris, with half saying Germany would invade Bohemia and the other half thinking not. Daladier and Bonnet tasked their minister in Berlin with giving a demarche to the German foreign office, informing them that France would regard "most seriously" any march of German troops into Czech lands as a violation of Munich.⁵⁴ Bullitt asked Bonnet what the French would do if Hitler entered Bohemia anyway, and Bonnet responded that he had "no idea." Bullitt made sure to point out to the department that Bonnet's admission was "quite true."⁵⁵ The British had no intention of sending a demarche to

⁵¹ Biddle to Hull, telegram no. 20, March 14, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/636. In this report, Biddle also hinted at Polish fears of Slovakia's entry into the Berlin orbit. Though officially applauding Slovakia's right to self-determination, the move turned Poland's southern frontier into a Nazi borderland.

⁵² Carr to Hull, telegram no. 29, March 14, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/616.

⁵³ At seven p.m., Bullitt reported statements made by Weiszacker that twelve to fourteen German divisions were stationed along the Czech frontier. Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 480, section 1, March 14, NARA, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/626.

⁵⁴ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 480, sections 1-3, March 14, 1939, seven p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/626.

⁵⁵ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 480, section 3, March 14, 1939, seven p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/626.

Berlin. Herschel Johnson, American chargé in London, offered his impression to Washington that the British foreign office was not alarmed or surprised as these types of events were to be expected as long as Hitler's regime was in power.⁵⁶

By nightfall, howling winds and icy temperatures overcame Prague's streets. The Carrs and the Kennans went to the opera that night, and as they made their way against the frigid cold rumors of Chvalkovsky and Hacha's departure coursed through the city "like wildfire." Later, as the performers gave their best rendition of "Rusalka," Kennan could not help but dwell on the "equally fantastic but grimly real" performance Hitler was surely giving to the president and foreign minister.⁵⁷ After the show, the legation staff burned the midnight oil at the Schonborn before taking a drive around the city for curiosity's sake. Apart from a few jeering adolescents, all was quiet. On the whole, the staff found it difficult to guess what was coming Prague's way. Little could be known until the substance of the Chvalkovsky and Hacha's talks with Hitler were made public, but it seemed to them that a partial occupation was most likely with a complete one not being out of the question.⁵⁸

In Berlin, Hacha and Chvalkovsky fared terribly.⁵⁹ Arriving well after ten p.m., Chvalkovsky's request to postpone the meeting to the following day was tossed aside by Ribbentrop, who assured the two Czechs that the meeting would not take long. Hitler, angered

⁵⁶ Johnson to Hull, telegram no. 330, March 14, 1939, eight p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/633.

⁵⁷ Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 84. "Rusalka" is a Slav fairy-tale. Considering the circumstances, Kennan thought a performance of Tchaikovsky's "Evgeni Onegin" would have been more relevant. In it, a dueling tenor waits for his opponent, singing: "What has the dawning day in store for me? What is it that my eyes seek in vain to discern?"

⁵⁸ Kennan, "Prague—Munich Occupation," 44. According to Kennan, he and the legation staff concluded that the Germans could not execute a complete occupation because it would exasperate the Slovak and Ruthene problems while also sacrificing Germans in those areas.

⁵⁹ This general account of Hacha and Chvalkovsky's visit to Berlin is based from Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy, 1933-1939*; Prochazka, *The Second Republic*, 132-146; Watt, *How War Came*, 152-154; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1948), 342-346.

that his visitors had arrived later than expected, made them wait until 1:10 a.m. before calling them into the Reich Chancellery. Going into the meeting, Hacha and Chvalkovsky expected the primary topic of discussion to be Slovakia's independence and its constitutional implications, but when Hacha began speaking on the subject, an irate Hitler launched into an anti-Czech harangue, culminating with a pronouncement that Germany would be entering Bohemia and Moravia at six that morning. He handed the stunned officials the terms of the ultimatum and suggested that they consult with their advisors in Prague. As if to emphasize the need for a quick decision, Goering commented that, as unfortunate as it would be, his *Luftwaffe* would bomb and destroy the beautiful city if necessary, prompting Hacha to faint.

Soon after, Ribbentrop presented Hacha with a draft of a declaration, for his signature, stating he was placing the fate of the Czech people and country in Hitler's hands. Goering, Ribbentrop, and Keitel cried "sign, sign!" until the broken, exhausted, and bewildered Hacha put his name to the document—without authorization from Prague—just before four a.m.⁶⁰ Though the U.S. legation picked up bits and pieces of what happened during the visit the following day, it would not be until the 18th that it reported the pitiful details to the department.⁶¹

The Prague radio service began announcing the imminent Nazi invasion at four a.m. All military personnel and civilians were admonished to offer no resistance of any kind. At 4:30, Kennan awoke to a phone call, and the voice on the other end, "shaky and terrified," informed

⁶⁰ After signing the declaration, Hacha telephoned Prague and said, "All discussion is henceforth in vain. I signed the declaration, without authorization, I know. But in the present situation I tried to save at least our people." Chvalkovsky, in response to the rapid turn of events, told an adviser, "Our people will curse us and still we have saved their existence. We have preserved them from a horrible massacre." Prochazka, *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia, October 1938-March 1939* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981), 141-142.

⁶¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 53, March 18, 1939, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/693. The legation's report containing details of Hacha's visit to Berlin painted a pathetic picture. Too weak to travel by plane, he and the foreign minister went by train, resulting in their late arrival. Overcome by the dreadful news of occupation, Hacha fainted, and it was only after Hitler's physician administered a stimulant injection that Hacha mustered the strength to sign the declaration placing the Czech lands in Hitler's hands.

him of the full occupation to come.⁶² Kennan immediately called Riley and others, but declined to call Carr out of concern for the great amount of stress the minister had been under in addition to his old age. Kennan's concern turned out to be moot, however, as an "over-zealous" consular colleague, John Bruins, had already decided to wake Carr.⁶³ It was not long before the American staff began gathering at the legation. Kennan, "determined that the German army should not have the satisfaction of giving the American Legation a harried appearance," shaved meticulously before walking to the Schonborn through the howling wind and falling snow.

On March 15, Czecho-Slovakia was "snuffed out."⁶⁴ At six a.m., the staff cabled Washington that Germany's military occupation of "CS" would begin right then, six a.m.⁶⁵ As Major Riley would later inform the department, German soldiers had been moving into Moravia from Silesia during the night, well before Hacha had signed his capitulation.⁶⁶ Thus, the German invasion proceeded with steady progress, and within an hour, cities like Brno and Olomouc were under German control. It was not yet ten a.m. when German forces arrived in Prague and General von Goblentz established himself in the Hrad.⁶⁷ Despite the ice and snow, the German invasion force, utilizing the main roads, occupied the entire county before the day was through.

⁶² Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 85.

⁶³ Kennan, "Prague—Munich Occupation," 44.

⁶⁴ The Associated Press, "Armies on March," *New York Times*, March 15, 1939, 1.

⁶⁵ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 32, March 15, 1939, six a.m., NARA, RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 1939, 800.

⁶⁶ On the evening of March 14, Riley learned from a journalist friend that German troops were in Moravska Ostrava—one of Moravia's larger cities, and an important one for transportation and communication between the country's western and eastern provinces—around the same time as Hacha's departure for Berlin. Riley, "German Army Occupation of Czechoslovakia," report no. P-1183, March 20, 1939, 1, NARA, RG 165, correspondence 1917-41, Box 1704. Hacha was made aware of Germany's occupation of the city while waiting in the hotel in Berlin. He apparently paid little attention to this news. His seeming lack of concern for an invasion of his country is explainable by at least two facts. First, even upon their arrival in Berlin, Chvalkovsky remained optimistic that Germany would not carry out a full occupation. Second, already overwhelmed, Hacha's focus was on his looming meeting with Hitler, which he thought would be primarily a discussion of the Slovak constitutional crisis.

⁶⁷ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 33, March 15, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 1939, 800.

Throughout the day the Americans observed Prague's citizens as they reacted to the miserable news unfolding before them. Kennan, while walking home for breakfast at around seven a.m., watched as people made frantic, last-minute preparations, many rushing to banks to withdraw as much money as possible. On the streets, apathy mixed with heartbreak with some people walking to work as normal while others wept into their handkerchiefs.⁶⁸ News of when the Germans would arrive in the capital occupied the people's minds all morning. By nine a.m., such news took on a tangible form as German armored cars and tanks, that "winding iron caterpillar," rode authoritatively through the streets, battling the forty-mile gusts and windswept snow. According to Riley, the weather was so poor that Germany's mechanized divisions proceeded unevenly throughout the country, resulting in high numbers of stragglers and significant gaps in organized troop movements.⁶⁹ Regardless, to onlookers, the German soldiers looked like robots, who together comprised one giant "iron machine" programmed to take possession of the city. Alice Masaryk, daughter of the former president, listened mournfully from her apartment near the Hrad: "the windows shook, the massive walls vibrated... It seemed a real doomsday."⁷⁰ It had only been six hours since the Czechs had learned that their city was to become a Reich possession, and between the snowy conditions, the shock of a German invasion, and the requests of their government to forsake resistance, Carr could report that, notwithstanding the rumblings of Wehrmacht machinery, all of Prague was quiet.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Kennan, personal notes, March 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 86.

⁶⁹ Riley, "German Occupation of Czechoslovakia," report no. P-1183, March 20, 1939, NARA, RG 165, correspondence 1917-41, Box 1704.

⁷⁰ Descriptions of the invasion taken from Masaryk, *Alice Garrigue Masaryk, 1879-1966*, 162-163. Masaryk could hardly muster the resolve to open the curtains and observe the occupation. When she did at last approach the window, she poetically noted how "the snow continued to fall steadily—a rare thing in March in Czechoslovakia. That is the time spring begins" before pulling the curtains closed once more.

⁷¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 34, March 15, 1939, ten a.m., NARA, RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 1939, 800.

As the day progressed, order prevailed and Czecho-Slovakia's dissolution took on concrete form. While the Wehrmacht overran Bohemia and Moravia, Hungarian troops inched closer to the Polish border—albeit without the same success as achieved by the Germans—thereby eliminating Ruthenia from the map as they marched.⁷² Slovakia's independence gained credence that afternoon when Warsaw granted Bratislava diplomatic recognition.⁷³ In Prague, the blizzard continued raging and the Czechs in the streets milled about in “stony silence,” tears, or nonchalance.⁷⁴ Apathy, borne out of the years of crisis and the looming German threat, was also widespread, allowing a level of amiability to develop between Czechs and the well-behaved German soldiers in some instances. Czechs, examining the Wehrmacht's machinery, teased their occupiers about the “old stuff” they had used to seize the city. Others informed the soldiers of which stamps to buy or where to find the cheapest beer.⁷⁵

Hitler came to Prague in the evening, arriving about an hour before Hacha and Chvalkovsky. Wanting to spend the evening in the castle, Hitler and his entourage had raced through the icy roads.⁷⁶ From his kitchen window Kennan watched Hitler motor by, “looking at once pleased and bewildered to find himself master of this city.”⁷⁷ That night, many from the legation drove around Prague. The eight-p.m. curfew left the city empty, quiet, and “dead.”⁷⁸ Kennan observed that “it was so strange to see these Prague streets, usually so animated, now

⁷² Hungarian troops encountered resistance from Ruthene forces, and both sides suffered more than nominal casualties. Hungary received no aid from Germany or Poland during its occupation of Ruthenia. Montgomery to Hull, telegram no. 49, March 15, 1939, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/648.

⁷³ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 484, March 15, 1939, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/644.

⁷⁴ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 36, March 15, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/647. Carr did note that sidewalk crowds had attempted a few demonstrations during the afternoon but nothing serious came of them.

⁷⁵ Alexander Henderson, *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia* (London: George B. Harrap & Co., 1939), 318.

⁷⁶ Walter Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walter Schellenberg*, trans. Alan Bullock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), pgs. 36-37.

⁷⁷ Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, vi.

⁷⁸ Henderson, *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia*, 316.

completely empty and deserted. Tomorrow, to be sure, they would fill with life again, but it would not be the same life that had filled them before; and we were all acutely conscious that in this case the curfew had indeed tolled the knell of a long and distinctly tragic day.”⁷⁹

The city retained its mixture of apathy and sadness the following day. The Gestapo had made hundreds of arrests during the night and instilled a great amount of fear in the populace.⁸⁰ Czech spies, German Social Democrats, and outspoken critics of Nazism were, in the words of the U.S. legation, “no more than hunted animals.”⁸¹ It was the Jewish community that had the most to fear, though.⁸² On the afternoon of the 16th, Carr cabled the Department that Ribbentrop had officially declared the protectorate from the Hrad balcony at one p.m.⁸³ Within his pronouncement he made sure to note that henceforth the Nuremberg anti-Jewish laws would be applied. The American legation had already been confronted with the plight of Jews, as dozens showed up at the Schonborn on the day of the occupation, pleading for a way out of the city. Overwhelmed by the numbers of asylum seekers, they had to post a consul at the entrance to turn away those who the staff did not know.⁸⁴ The legation could do little for even those they did know. All Kennan could tell one Jewish acquaintance was that he was free to remain at the palace until he nerves calmed: “He paced wretchedly up and down the anteroom, through the

⁷⁹ Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, 99.

⁸⁰ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 98-100. According to Rothkirchen: “A thousand persons were arrested during the first week of the German occupation; before long, 4,639 were behind bars...most of these early prisoners were subsequently released, except for German-Jewish refugees, who were sent to concentration camps.”

⁸¹ Kennan, “Personal Notes on the Final Occupation,” in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 85.

⁸² For a detailed account of how the Jewish community fared in the aftermath of the German occupation, see Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 99-137. Rothkirchen pulls substantially from reports drafted by Carr, Kennan, and Linnell.

⁸³ Hitler made one appearance on the Hrad’s balcony, and only then to greet a group of German school children that the authorities had rounded up for propaganda purposes. The Czech population remained apathetic toward both the occupation and Hitler’s presence in the castle. Carr to Hull, telegram no. 42, March 16, noon, NARA, RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 1939, 800-CS.

⁸⁴ Kennan, “Personal Notes on the Final Occupation of Prague,” in Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 87.

long morning hours. In the afternoon, he decided to face the music and went home.”⁸⁵ Kennan even had Jewish acquaintances coming to his home in search of asylum, though little to nothing could be done.⁸⁶

Much like the aftermath of Munich, the legation received pleas and requests of support from Czech and Jewish communities. Not all asked for specific things to be done, though, and some simply pointed to the important bond the two countries shared. One letter, signed anonymously as “The Czech Sentry,” asked the legation to understand that even if Hacha had surrendered, many of the people had not, and that for “their future as a nation, the Czechs depend on their quenchless determination to be absolutely free, a spirit not broken in their history by no defeat...For support they look to their American friends again, and for encouragement to the great democracy of the United States and to the human understanding of these States’ people and representatives.”⁸⁷

Pleas for solidarity did not go completely unsatisfied. On March 17, Welles delivered the department’s response to the occupation, which said in part that

This Government, founded upon and dedicated to the principles of human liberty and of democracy cannot refrain from making known this country’s condemnation of the acts which have resulted in the temporary extinguishment of the liberties of a free and independent people with whom, from the day when the Republic of Czechoslovakia attained its independence, the people of the United States have maintained specially close and friendly relations...It is manifest that acts of wanton lawlessness and of arbitrary force are threatening world peace and the very structure of modern civilization. The imperative need for the observance of the principles advocated by this Government has

⁸⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁶ When recalling one of the Jewish acquaintances who came by his house, Kennan writes, “For twenty-four hours he haunted the house, a pitiful figure of horror and despair, moving uneasily around the drawingroom, smoking one cigarette after another, too unstrung to eat or think of anything but his plight. His brother and sister-in-law had committed suicide together after Munich, and he had a strong inclination to follow suit. Annelise [Kennan’s wife] pleaded with him at intervals throughout the coming hours not to choose this way out, not because she or I had any great optimism with respect to his chances for future happiness but partly on general Anglo-Saxon principles and partly to preserve our home from this sort of an unpleasantness.” Ibid.

⁸⁷ “The Czech Sentry” to the United States Embassy in Prague, March 17, 1939, NARA, RG 84, correspondence file, Prague, vol. 3.

been clearly demonstrated by the developments which have taken place during the past three days.⁸⁸

Though its impact was little more than symbolic, it was an important message on Washington's part, particularly for its clarity. Not only did it make special note of the friendship that existed between the United States and Czechoslovakia, but it also pulled no punches in calling out Berlin for its "wanton lawlessness and arbitrary force."

Naturally, the department wanted its message circulated widely among the Czechs. Welles cabled Carr instructing the minister to make the department's statement available to the Czechoslovak press in the hopes that it would receive ample publicity throughout the country.⁸⁹ The request highlighted Washington's ignorance of what had become of Bohemia and Moravia in the few days since its occupation. They should have had an idea, considering that in a March 16 dispatch, Carr and Major Riley referred to Prague as an "armed camp," describing how German soldiers took residence in schools and public buildings around the city, and how censorship, which had been tight even before the occupation, had gotten much worse.⁹⁰ Carr answered Welles with a grim reality check, educating the department on just how badly things had gotten in the Czech lands. The Germans had complete control of the press and the Gestapo was everywhere. Thus, in regard to the American message of condemnation, "it would be virtual suicide for anyone to publish [it]."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 615. Hull, who was in Florida during of the occupation, helped draft the Department's message which Welles delivered. The middle section of the statement read: "The position of the government of the United States has been consistently clear. It has emphasized the need for respect for the sanctity of treaties and of the pledged word and for nonintervention by any nation in the domestic affairs of other nations; and it has on repeated occasions expressed its condemnation of a policy of military aggression."

⁸⁹ Welles to Carr, telegram no. 15, March 17, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/690A.

⁹⁰ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 43, March 16, 1939, six p.m., NARA RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 800-CS.

⁹¹ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 52, March 17, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/692. It would have been unlikely for a message such as the one Welles sent Carr to have been published in Czecho-Slovakia even as early as January 1939. After Chvalkovsky's visit to Berlin that month, Prague doubled-downed on its efforts to appease Germany and implemented strict censorship of the press.

The refugee problem worsened in the ensuing days, and it became more difficult for the legation to sit idly by. This was especially true of Carr. Having received instructions from the department on the 17th to begin the process of closing the legation, Carr's time in Prague was nearing an end. In the twenty months Carr spent as minister to Prague, he had come to hold the country and its people in special regard. Together, the Carrs had entered "wholeheartedly" into Czechoslovakia's cultural scene. They traveled the country extensively and made many friends and acquaintances along the way. Throughout his decades in Washington, Carr pressed for consuls and diplomats to pursue deep understandings of the countries in which they served, and in Prague, Carr heeded his own advice fully. To his delight, "he enjoyed Czechoslovakia, and he was able to make the Czechoslovaks enjoy him."⁹² It was thus with sincere pain that the old minister reported how thousands of Social Democrats, Jews, and political refugees fled for their lives, and how many women and children spent days and nights hiding in the snow-covered woods surrounding Prague.

Carr was an important point of contact for local refugee relief agencies working to convince foreign governments to increase visa quotas.⁹³ Carr was a seasoned veteran of this line of work, having been at the forefront of the country's immigration and visa policy for many years. Beyond knowing how restrictive U.S. policies had been, Carr remained doubtful that Germany would cooperate in any meaningful way. Meanwhile the Gestapo escalated its arrests into the thousands— "the Jewish population is terrified." "Consequently," wrote Carr, "if action can be taken it should be done speedily."⁹⁴

⁹² Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 344.

⁹³ Carr to Hull, telegram no. 55, March 19, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 84, correspondence, Prague, vol. 3, 800-Refugees.

⁹⁴ Carr to Hull, March 19, 1939, five p.m., *FRUS*, 1939, General, 49.

An hour later, Carr cabled Washington a most fascinating message. Seemingly unable to contain his concerns any longer, the minister pressed his own government to take decisive action on behalf of Czech refugees. Though “fully aware of and in full sympathy with the later reports and policy of the United States in regard to immigration,” Carr felt that a “special situation” existed in the former Czechoslovak state, and that it demanded the attention of both the president and Congress. As a basis for the United States getting involved, Carr cited the fact that the

Czechoslovak state was in part the creation of the United States of America upon whose form of government the Czechoslovaks were proud to model their own. There are many here who gave their best efforts over a period of years with the encouragement and strengthened support of the United States...to preserve in Central Europe an independent state devoted to the principles of liberty for which the United States stands...They may justly be proud of their contribution to progressive and enlightened government. Through no real fault of theirs their independence has ended.⁹⁵

Carr’s appeal to the countries’ shared values is interesting. The minister was not one to toss around these types of platitudes, not having done so in the aftermaths of previous refugee crises, such as those caused by the Anschluss and Munich. Rather, it was others who brought such appeals to him, begging his legation and his government to do something in the name of U.S.-Czech solidarity. Each time, Carr and his staff could only express gratitude for the sender’s concern, tacitly admitting that the goodwill inherent to U.S-Czech relations could not manifest in practical relief. Thus, March 19 saw an interesting role reversal as Carr asked his government to act.

He went on to point out that without international pressure, Germany would not allow refugees to leave the country. Carr continued that

by law they are effectually shut out of the one country whose policies and principles they have sought most earnestly to emulate. It seems to me that by not opening our doors to a reasonable number of these distressed people the United States is likely to appear to the people here who depended upon its friendship to the end and to democratic people everywhere as lacking in sincerity and humane interest in the very people who have tried

⁹⁵ Carr to Hull, March 19, 1939, six p.m., *FRUS*, 1939, General, 50.

to mold their institutions upon its model. I think this should not be viewed as an emigration matter but one of the protection of innocent human beings from the effect of a catastrophe.⁹⁶

As mentioned, Carr was no stranger to the complexities and inertia sewn into immigration law. In fact, in the 1920s he had helped craft and enforce America's exclusionary immigration policy. Historian Irwin Gellman argues that Carr believed that restrictive immigration policies went hand-in-hand with being a respected member of the "diplomatic club."⁹⁷ In borderline cases for visas, then, Carr typically applied the law to an applicant's disadvantage. Undoubtedly the circumstances were extremely difficult, and it would be wrong to assume that Carr relished keeping people out of the country.⁹⁸ But nonetheless Carr spent years rigorously applying the United States exacting visa protocol, having to decline, however painfully, all sorts of 'special cases,' distressed people, and innocent human beings in unfortunate situations. Thus, his plea for Washington to invest itself into helping Czech refugees is noteworthy, not because of any profound impact it had, but because it shows the compassion and helplessness Carr felt for the Czechs as he prepared to leave his post.

Carr's desire for Washington to intervene on a very practical and humanitarian level held weak precedent. Throughout the crisis, Washington and the department maintained a posture of inactivity, preferring to keep tabs but stay aloof. Though the rapidity of the new Czech crisis demanded attention, officials expected it to be "short-lived and settled from Berlin."⁹⁹ England and France's unwillingness to get involved only bolstered America's neutral, detached approach

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Irwin Gellman, *Secret Affairs, Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 37.

⁹⁸ Historians offer different perspectives on Carr's legacy in dealing with immigration law. For a sympathetic perspective, see Crane, *Mr. Carr of State*, 269-278. For a critical view, see Gellman, *Secret Affairs*, 36-38. For a broader perspective of the Department as a whole, see Robert Schulzinger, *The Making of the Diplomatic Mind: The Training, Outlook, and Style of United States Foreign Service Officers, 1908-1931* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 126-134.

⁹⁹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 13, 1939.

to the March crisis. Munich itself had been England and France's prerogative, at least when considering the world's leading democracies, and in the department's eyes, Czech-German relations had remained their issue into 1939. Even as prospects for a German occupation of Bohemia-Moravia became likely—an action which the democracies knew would constitute a gross breach of international conduct—France and England had no intention of interfering with Berlin's policy in the region. In fact, the two governments feared that any statement of condemnation directed against Hitler would only fuel his passion to prove that Germany, and Germany alone, had anything to say in east and central Europe.¹⁰⁰ The expectation that Hungary and Poland would occupy Ruthenia in conjunction with Berlin's de facto control of Bratislava added a further measure of futility to any notion of France or England trying to mediate.¹⁰¹

By the evening of March 14, Paris, but especially London, had arguably resorted to self-inflicted, purposeful naiveté. While French officials acknowledged to American circles that the Germans had clearly manufactured circumstances to bring about the end of Czecho-Slovakia, British circles clung to the notion that there was “no proof” of Berlin inciting the Slovaks. Within both governments there was a preponderant number who believed that the Slovaks had sold themselves out, that the current crisis confirmed that Czechoslovakia had always been “nonviable,” and for these reasons the crisis should be treated as purely an internal Czech-Slovak matter.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 474, section 5, March 14, 1939, one p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/613.

¹⁰¹ Georges Bonnet, the French foreign minister, told Bullitt as much on the afternoon of March 14. Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 475, March 14, 1939, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/617.

¹⁰² Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 476, section 1, March 14, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/624; Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 477, sections 1-2, March 14, 1939, five p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 14, 860F.00/625. According to Bullitt, London and Paris were considering sending a demarche to Berlin, inquiring whether the policy of collaboration established at Munich had been abandoned. By “nonviable,” British and French circles meant that Czechoslovakia “had been still born and had never possessed the possibility of an independent existence.”

American reports suggested further contrasts between Prague's Munich and March crises. Throughout Munich, the British and French presses served as the locus of ideas, heated debates, and opinions of all stripes on what the governments should do. In March, the presses, almost mirroring their government's nonplussed state, remained largely mute on ideas, instead conceding that little to nothing could be done—as upsetting as it may have been to admit, Parisians and Londoners considered it too late to aid Czecho-Slovakia.¹⁰³ Thus, in the face of this mixture of confusion, apathy, and helplessness from London and Paris, Washington had no means to enter the fray, even indirectly.¹⁰⁴

As the crisis came to a head, American officials in Washington witnessed the Czechs respond with a peculiar mix of ignorance and ambivalence. It was a stark contrast to Munich, when the Prague government vowed to fight to the end and only capitulated with heavy hearts and courage for the future. Months of German pressure had taken its toll. Just hours before Germany announced its intent to occupy the Czech lands, Moffat met with the counselor of the Czech legation, and he could not help but notice that “the attitude of Dr. Brejska, whom I saw nearly every day during the crisis last summer, has completely changed. He seemed apathetic and defeatist. Formerly he had always emphasized the innate power of resistance of the Czechs; today he shrugged his shoulders.”¹⁰⁵ The department received messages from its diplomats in Europe indicating similar attitudes among the Czech ministers. Alexander Kirk, the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, reported on the evening of the 14th the Czech minister's fatalistic

¹⁰³ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 482, sections 1-2, March 14, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/634. According to Bullitt, those who fell on both sides of the Munich issue in Paris agreed in March that recent developments had been the “inevitable results” of the previous fall.

¹⁰⁴ In his memoirs, Hull addresses Washington's passivity during spring 1939 when Hitler reduced Czecho-Slovakia to a mere “mockery.” Hull writes that Chamberlain was the same as he was at Munich, and that little could be done until he received the “harsh awakening” that was just around the corner. Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 614.

¹⁰⁵ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 14, 1939.

and hopeless state of mind.¹⁰⁶ From Belgrade, Arthur Bliss Lane shared the bitter remarks of the Czech minister there, who concluded that Hacha must either be senile or a traitor.¹⁰⁷

American officials immediately attached importance to the occupation because of how it shocked the nations, particularly France and Britain, into a realistic appraisal of Hitler, and convinced them of the need to rearm. On the evening of the 14th, before the occupation had become inevitable, Bullitt reported that general thought in London and Paris had largely dismissed any more talk of world conferences and arms limitations, instead holding to the view they must “stand side by side and pursue their rearmament programs.”¹⁰⁸ This view took on a whole new vigor the next day. The *Manchester Guardian* argued on March 15 that the occupation was the inevitable result of Munich, and that if Britain could not fight then, she could also not fight now. Rather, Hitler’s occupation of Prague afforded Britain an opportunity to “reflect with shame on the past and to prepare with energy for the future.”¹⁰⁹ When iterating the views of his French contact that same day, Bullitt cabled the department that the occupation had proven the “worthlessness of Hitler’s signature.” March 15, then, wrote Bullitt, had served a purpose, albeit an unfortunate one, in that it set the democracies on a course of rearmament.¹¹⁰

American officials in Washington likewise lost no time in reflecting on how Hitler’s decision to occupy Bohemia and Moravia meant a new era of foreign policy on the continent.

¹⁰⁶ Kirk to Hull, telegram no. 106, March 14, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/632. Kirk paraphrased the Czech minister, who said that “Hitler will proceed with his plans to eliminate all opposition to Nazi power in Czechoslovakia.”

¹⁰⁷ Lane to Hull, telegram no. 22, March 15, 1939, nine p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/653.

¹⁰⁸ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 482, section 3, March 14, 1939, six p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/634.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson to Hull, telegram no. 331, March 15, 1939, two p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/646. Other British newspapers reported that since the Munich powers never guaranteed Czechoslovakia’s Munich borders, Britain was in no way bound to come to Prague’s aid.

¹¹⁰ Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 494, March 16, 1939, four p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/697

Moffat, who spent the 15th in meetings with Welles, Messersmith, Berle, and others, concluded that the occupation made a number of truths self-evident. First, Hitler had clearly violated his solemn pledges of not wanting to absorb non-Germans. Second, he had blatantly destroyed the settlement reached at Munich. Third, his move into Bohemia and Moravia went against the principle of self-determination, the very principle he had used to justify his demands the previous fall.¹¹¹ Bullitt relayed thoughts that same day, stating that Hitler's excursion into Prague shattered any pretense that his aggressive behavior was tied to a desire to incorporate Germans into the Reich. Now, said Bullitt, even a blind man could see that Hitler, like a new Napoleon, aimed for nothing short of European hegemony.¹¹²

“What to do is the question,” wrote Moffat before retiring to bed on March 15. Officials in Washington were divided. Everyone was angered by Berlin's aggression, but no one could say for sure what would be the best course of action. Moffat and the others debated the implications of severing ties with Berlin altogether. Messersmith, the staunchest anti-Nazi in the department, pushed for a harsh response as he paced with his eyes “aglow.”¹¹³ Ultimately, though deciding not to completely sever relations with Berlin, officials in Washington did gear U.S. policy toward taking a harder stance against Germany. The department also took advantage of opportunities to express solidarity with Prague and to be more forthcoming in its sympathy. It helped Miss Alice Masaryk get out of Prague safely, and in addition to its March 17 statement, the department went out of its way to withhold formal recognition of Germany's seizure of the

¹¹¹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 15, 1939.

¹¹² Bullitt to Hull, telegram no. 488, March 15, 1939, three p.m., NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/649. In his diplomat diary, Moffat also made the Napoleonic comparison, writing that “it looks as though Hitler were more successful even than Napoleon.” Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 15, 1939.

¹¹³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 15, 1939.

Czech lands. However, this solidarity was limited in its influence and did not stretch into the realms of what Carr had hoped for regarding refugee relief.

From a bird's eye view, the efforts of the Americans in Prague during the March occupation serve as a sure sign of just how impotent the symbolic relationship between the two countries had become. The Schonborn was nothing more than a listening post, and the legation was never in a position to engage the crisis proactively. It could only report the constant influx of rumors from inside the city and from other posts around Europe. Carr and other American ministers flooded Washington with updates, but even at the end of March 14 no one was expecting a complete occupation. Moffat expressed views within the department that Carr had, again, been unfortunately "caught napping," but in reality, the diplomatic corps of Prague, London, Paris, and Rome were caught napping, too.¹¹⁴ Geist had come the closest to recognizing the possible extremity of German action on March 13, but even then, he was not aware of Nazi influence in Slovakia, and how it served as a prelude to the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. When the occupation did in fact come to pass, the immediate response was similar to what happened during Munich. Those at the Schonborn spent much of the crisis traveling about the city and observing the populace's response. Once again, they witnessed the quiet, the shock, the tears, and the unsettling realization that Germany's solemn claims could not to be trusted, and that Hitler was probably not yet finished.

¹¹⁴ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 15, 1939.

Chapter Four: “Documentation”

The morning of March 15, 1939, when the German motorized divisions pushed their way through blinding snow-storms into the cities of Bohemia and Moravia, marked a turning point in the history of these provinces no less revolutionary than the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 or the establishment of the Czechoslovak state in the fall of 1918...The events which followed have been observed by few outsiders and understood by less. The experiences of these unhappy provinces...[have] become one of Germany's most important internal problems.¹

Following the occupation, as well as Carr's departure and the closing of the American legation, U.S.-Czech relations entered a unique, new phase. Only Kennan and the Prague Consulate General remained to represent American interests in the occupied lands. The consulate continued to function for logistical purposes—to help American citizens in Bohemia and Moravia, or to mitigate problems pertaining to U.S. interests in the region. Kennan, on the other hand, stayed for purely reportorial reasons. The department, almost at a loss for what to do with Kennan, instructed him to observe the region now under German occupation or influence, and to send back reports analyzing the political situation. Kennan, always an astute observer and eager writer, went above and beyond with this loose job description. After five months of investigative reporting, Kennan's documentation of the Czech lands under German control, also called the Protectorate, as well as the quasi-independent Slovakia, constituted the most in-depth descriptions of the Czech and Slovak lands in the months leading up to World War II from an American perspective, if not altogether.

Indications that U.S.-Czech relations were entering a new phase came just a few days after the occupation, when Benes sent telegrams to Paris, London, Moscow, and to Washington as well, in which he reiterated the laundry list of injustices Czechoslovakia had absorbed and asked the receiving governments to see the German threat for what it was. In his message, he

¹ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 226.

pointed out that Hitler was not just a menace to Central Europe, but also Western Europe, the British Isles, the United States, and the entire world.² While Benes bristled at the response he received from Chamberlain, only a “short” message referring him to the Birmingham speech, Benes was grateful for Roosevelt’s reply.³ In it, the president noted that the United States had only afforded Germany de facto recognition of its seizure of Bohemia and Moravia, and he finished by saying, “I need hardly add that I deeply sympathize with the Czechoslovak people in the unfortunate circumstances in which for the time being they find themselves.”⁴ Beyond putting great stock in Roosevelt’s expression of sympathy, Benes felt that Washington had led the charge in condemning Germany’s occupation of the Czech lands, and that France and Britain had only vocalized their disgust over Hitler’s behavior after the United States had taken the first step.⁵ Whether that was true or not, the occupation allowed Benes to come out from his apolitical professorship to begin establishing his government-in-exile. Meanwhile, the United States began aligning itself more closely with partiality for the Czechs, both because of Germany’s descent into outright aggression and Slovakia’s descent into the German orbit.

Back in Washington, department officials were in consistent contact with ministers of various central and eastern European states. Their conversations inspired little hope in the idea that Czechoslovakia’s sacrifice, which began at Munich and reached finality on March 15, yielded any real benefits. Rumania, Czechoslovakia’s weak but faithful ally of the Little Entente, claimed that Hitler’s march on Prague proved that nothing was to be gained from succumbing to

² Benes, *Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 68. In his Birmingham speech of March 17, Chamberlain strongly denounced Hitler and Nazi Germany “in words of bitterness such as no British Prime Minister has ever used toward Nazi Germany.” Ferdinand Kuhn, “Chamberlain Denounces Hitler,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1939, 1. His speech signaled the death knell of his appeasement policy. “Response to Mr. Chamberlain’s Speech,” *The Manchester Guardian*, March 18, 1939, 16.

⁴ Roosevelt to Benes, March 27, 1939, FDR Papers, PSF: Czechoslovakia, 1938-1944, Box 28, 24.

⁵ Benes, *Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 69.

Berlin's threats.⁶ Unfortunately, Slovakia's willingness to come under German wings extended the Reich's influence to Rumania's frontiers. The two reached an economic deal within a week of the occupation, and Rumania, despite its gutsy talk, joined the club of German satellites. Hungary, which had lustfully ripped pieces off the Czechoslovak carcass thanks to German support, was now reporting to the department that anti-German sentiment in Hungary was growing by leaps and bounds, but nothing could be made of it because they feared upsetting Berlin.⁷ Poland, the strongest of the three, found itself in the most precarious position, for once Hitler had secured Memel on March 20, he fixed his eyes on Danzig. In a conversation with Moffat that same day, Poland's minister spoke resolutely about his government's intention to fight if need be.⁸ In less than a week, then, Moffat heard straight from the Rumanian, Hungarian, and Polish ministers their acquiescence to Hitler, their fear of German retribution, and their irreconcilable differences with German foreign policy.⁹ The region was collapsing; war seemed certain; and Czechoslovakia's sacrifice appeared useless.

Both the State Department and Roosevelt Administration interacted with the splinters of Czecho-Slovakia's dissolution in a number of ways. Like during the preceding six months,

⁶ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 17, 1939, 3-4.

⁷ Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 3, 1939, 4.

⁸ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 20, 1939, 1-2. Kennan's reports provided confirmation of Poland's strong talk. For instance, in late-April, Kennan sent word to the department that there were lingering border skirmishes between Poles and Germans in the district of Moravska-Ostrava, a frontier Moravian town. The Germans desired to acquire control of a railway junction in Oderberg, which was in Polish territory near the Teschen district. When the Germans would attempt to disembark soldiers at Oderberg, who were only ever granted the right to pass through while remaining on the train, Polish soldiers would immediately open fire and force the Germans to get on their way. Many Germans ended up in Czech hospitals as a result of run-ins with the Poles. Kennan, "Conditions in the Moravska-Ostrava District," April 26-27, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 131-132.

⁹ Meanwhile, Moffat and others found it extraordinary that Yugoslavia had remained so indifferent during the crisis. They noted how, to that point, Germany had criticized the Poles, Hungarians, and Rumanians, but not Yugoslavia. Belgrade had managed to stay out of Berlin's way. Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 8-9, 1939, 1-2. It would not take long for Belgrade to follow suit, however. By April, Arthur Lane, the American ambassador to Yugoslavia, was reporting the country's fear and defeatism toward its geopolitical situation: "The future course to be pursued by Yugoslavia will in my opinion not be formulated here but in Berlin or Rome, and Yugoslavia will do what she is told by the Axis powers." Lane to Hull, April 21, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, 141.

Washington was perfectly clear that its sympathies lay with peoples of the former Czech lands. However, with Slovakia going its own way and with the Protectorate's officials complying with Hitler, supporting Czechoslovakia became a somewhat amorphous idea. The occupation itself had put the United States into international quandary: as Europe sunk deeper into crisis, expectations grew among many that the United States, in some fashion, would get involved. The Rumanian minister, in speaking with Moffat, said as much when he argued that Hitler's occupation of Prague had proven that Berlin alone was the world's arbiter of force, and that only one moral counterforce remained—the United States.¹⁰ The United States was not ready or willing to become involved. Thus, its ability to actively help the Czechoslovak cause was limited, and Washington settled for low-hanging fruit. It was another peculiar time in U.S.-Czech relations, the final period before World War II, in which Washington and Prague's relationship, though still friendly, became nondescript and peripheral. There were more positive feelings in Washington with Hurban and Benes, but even these feelings were ultimately hollow at the center, not because of any lack of sincerity, but because the external factors of the times prevented substantive interaction.

Distinguishing between Germany's de facto takeover of the Czech lands from its legality was an important point for Washington. For instance, in the aftermath of the invasion, the department wanted to punish Berlin through economic penalties, including on its newly acquired territories: Bohemia, Moravia, and the puppet state Slovakia. In doing so, though, the department wanted to make sure that its imposition of sanctions on the Czechoslovak lands—designed to prevent Germany from benefitting in those areas in its trade with the United States—would in no way suggest that the department or administration had given Hitler's conquest legal merit.

¹⁰ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 17, 1939, 3.

Moffat and Green Hackworth, legal advisor to the department, worked closely with the Treasury to navigate this tight rope.¹¹ More issues came up regarding the matter due to the intricacies of the 1938 trade agreement between Czechoslovakia and the United States, and the department eventually had to rescind the treaty altogether. Still, “the most important thing,” said Moffat, was to “maintain our position that Czechoslovakia was in reality an existing entity, whose liberties had been temporarily extinguished.”¹²

The unwillingness of the United States to move beyond de facto recognition of Germany’s occupation of Bohemia and Moravia caused its fair share of practical issues, but the department remained firm in its decision and entertained long discussions on the matter.¹³ Problems arose, however, when Germany demanded that all foreign countries close their Czechoslovak legations, since no diplomacy was going to be exercised from the Protectorate, and that a country should request an exequatur from Berlin if it wished to maintain a consulate in Prague. While Britain complied, the French, not wanting to extend de facto or de jure recognition to Hitler, refused to ask for an exequatur. Hurban wanted to know what Washington planned to do, and Moffat expressed confidence that the department would ask for the exequatur, but that such an action would signal “no change in our attitude vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia.” The department wanted a consulate in Prague for purely practical reasons which would also prove convenient for Czechoslovak officials, said Moffat, and it in no way considered Berlin’s control of the region to be legal. “Personally,” he added, “it must be a comfort to the residents of Prague to see that the American Flag was still flying there.”¹⁴

¹¹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 17, 1939, 3.

¹² Ibid., 5; “Roosevelt Drops Czech Trade Pact,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1939, 8; “Death Blow Seen to German Trade,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1939, 37.

¹³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, May 1939, 2.

¹⁴ Moffat, diplomatic journal, May 27-28, 1939, 1-2.

It was not until the end of May that Washington asked Berlin for the exequatur. In doing this, though, the department wanted to make sure that Germany understood that its views toward the occupation had not changed. Thus, Hull had Alexander Kirk, the American chargé in Berlin, submit a request for the exequatur along with an oral statement saying that the United States had undergone no change in its position with regard to Czechoslovakia.¹⁵ Germany did not reply to Kirk's request and statement for a month, and when they did, they saw things differently: "In the opinion of the German Government the granting of the exequatur to a foreign consul for a given district is a formal act of sovereignty over that district... It is an evident self-contradiction to ask a government to perform an act in exercise of its sovereignty and at the same time to contest the right of that government to exercise such sovereignty."¹⁶ Unwilling to look past the self-contradiction, Berlin denied granting an exequatur to Linnell.

A minor issue as it was, the department refused to diverge from its marked position. Hull instructed Kirk to secure an interview at the German Foreign Office, where he was to reiterate the U.S. stance—that it was "constrained by force of circumstances to regard [Bohemia and Moravia] as under de facto administration of German authorities"—and to stress to his audience the manifold difficulties that would befall the Germans if the American consulate in Prague were to be closed.¹⁷ Weizsaecker, the German secretary of state, received Kirk on July 11, and the two discussed the disagreement in a "prolonged and thoroughly outspoken manner." By meeting's end, neither had budged, and Weizsaecker warned Kirk that Linnell would not be allowed to

¹⁵ Hull to Kirk, May 25, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 409.

¹⁶ Kirk to Hull, July 3, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 410. Germany submitted its statement of rejection to Kirk on June 30.

¹⁷ Hull to Kirk, July 8, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 411. Since Linnell was able to carry out his consulate responsibilities unobstructed during the month that had passed between Germany's initial demand that the State Department request an exequatur for Linnell and its reply to Kirk's statement with the caveat, the department was confident that it could continue to oppose Germany on the semantics of the exequatur without serious risk of losing its consulate in Prague. Linnell to Hull, July 13, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 415.

continue his role as consulate. Weizaecker was especially upset that the department seemed to be acting in concert with the British and French. This was not at all the case. In fact, with neutrality revisions hanging in the balance, the department had no mind of being associated with London and Paris on the matter.¹⁸ Thus, Hull tasked Kirk with “emphatically” rejecting Weizaecker’s hunch.¹⁹ Kirk did, and he continued to meet with representatives of the German Foreign Office throughout July, but Hull and the department had grown weary of the exequatur issue, preferring to let the situation stand as it was. The Germans, completely enveloped in war plans, never acted on their threats of shutting down Linnell’s consulate, which continued to function until September 1940.²⁰

Berlin’s demand that unnecessary legations close in light of the occupation worked the other way, too. That is, they expected Czecho-Slovak legations to shut their doors, or to place their responsibilities in the hands of corresponding German legations. Hacha and Chvalkovsky, now in full retreat, sent telegrams to their foreign offices around the globe, instructing ministers to comply with Berlin’s order. Vladimir Hurban, the minister in Washington, felt that such action was unwarranted, especially since Hacha had acted unconstitutionally when signing away Czechoslovakia’s independence.²¹

¹⁸ The department’s main goal, one which was shared by Roosevelt, was to remove the arms embargo from the existing neutrality legislation, thereby allowing Roosevelt to distinguish between belligerents and potentially provide aid to friendly states, which the department hoped would discourage Hitler from starting a general war. For a detailed account of the State Department’s role in the neutrality talks of spring and summer 1939, see Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 641-653 and Rauch, *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 102-127. Roosevelt’s and the department’s efforts to change the neutrality laws in 1939 failed due to strong isolationist blocs in the House and Senate. On those failures, Hull wrote, “No one can say definitely that the failure of our efforts to lift the arms embargo was a final, or even an important, factor in Hitler’s ultimate decision to go to war. I am certain, however, that if the arms embargo had been lifted in May, June, or even July 1939, he would inevitably have had to take this factor into his calculation.” Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 653.

¹⁹ Kirk to Hull, July 15, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 416.

²⁰ Hull to Kirk, July 22, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 416-419.

²¹ “Czech Envoy Finds Hacha Act Illegal,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1939, 3.

The State Department, which only accorded Hitler's occupation *de facto* recognition, not legal legitimacy, had no problem allowing Hurban to continue running his legation as representative of the temporarily extinguished Czechoslovakia Republic.²² Hurban's presence in the Washington throughout the spring and summer served as a tangible sign of where the United States stood in regard to Germany's occupation of the Czech lands, with the press running stories on Hurban often.²³ Moffat, always the one to whom Hurban brought his concerns, conveyed the department's sympathy to the distressed minister, informing him that his remaining in Washington caused no embarrassment to the United States, and that if circumstances were to change, he, Moffat, would be sure to inform the minister in an informal manner.²⁴

Hurban continued to call on Moffat, almost daily. He inquired about how to protect the legation's assets, potential visits from Benes, the refugee crisis, and his own staffing problems. Sometimes, his requests bordered on the ridiculous. At one point, when fretting over his inability to transfer the legation's gold reserves so as to keep them out of Berlin's reach, he presented a tenuous line-of-thinking in which he argued that, due to all that had happened in Europe, he *was* the Czechoslovak government. Moffat disagreed. Later, toward the end of March, he informed Moffat of his wishes to dismiss Konstantin Culen, the Slovak attaché, because he did not trust him, and wanted to know whether Moffat thought it possible to have Culen deported. Moffat,

²² The papers viewed the department's response as one of "moral aid" to the Czechs. "Hurban Will Get Moral Aid of U.S.," *New York Times*, March 19, 1939, 42. In writing to the president, William Bullitt, ambassador to Paris, expressed extreme happiness with the decision to continue recognizing Hurban. He recalled a story of how, during the many years when Poland ceased to exist, the Turkish Sultans would at every diplomatic function announce the Polish ambassador, who did not exist, in front of the Austrian, German, and Russian representatives. "That always seemed to me one of the really gentlemanly gestures in human history, and I am glad, at least for the moment, we are following this example." Roosevelt and Bullitt, *For the President Personal and Secret*, 325. The United States did have some precedent for continuing to recognize Hurban, having done likewise for the Czarist ambassador until 1933. "Moral Aid," *New York Times*, 42.

²³ For instance, in anticipation of the King and Queen of England's June visit Washington, a *New York Times* article reported that Hurban would represent Czechoslovakia, its subheading reading, "State Department Puts Minister of Extinct Country 23rd in Line." Edward Folliard, "Hurban to Meet Royalty as Czech Envoy," *New York Times*, April 20, 1939, 5.

²⁴ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 17, 1939, 2.

unfazed, promised Hurban that he would look into the feasibility of such a project. “My conclusion from the conversation,” recorded Moffat that evening, “is that instead of desiring to be of the least embarrassment to us [Hurban] will henceforth cause us no end of difficulties.”²⁵

As Moffat dealt with the fallout of the German occupation in Washington, Kennan began his reporting duties in Bohemia and Moravia. Though essentially left alone as the sole diplomatic presence in the Protectorate, Kennan found a lot of significance in the task ahead of him. As this was Hitler’s first attempt to occupy a large swath of non-German territory, it marked a new era of Nazi foreign policy, and Kennan, to his delight, was set loose by the department to report from the front lines. “I was effectively my own boss,” he later recalled.²⁶ Since no one seriously expected Hitler to be finished with his continental crawl, Kennan held that Germany’s handling of the Protectorate would constitute a sort of prototype which, if successful, might later be applied to other conquered regions and peoples.²⁷ It was a subtly historic opportunity, and Kennan dove headlong into his documenting responsibilities. Decades later he would consider his reports and analyses from this time to be some of his career’s best work.²⁸

Though Kennan loved the opportunity to roam free and produce long-form reports, these responsibilities did not come easy in the Protectorate. For Irving Linnell, the American consulate

²⁵ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 22, 1939, 1-3. At one point, Moffat brought to Hurban’s attention the recent news that Osusky, the Czech minister in Paris, had turned over his legation to the French, and that if Hurban ever felt inclined to do likewise, the department would happily oblige. Moffat’s subtle jibe offended Hurban, who excitedly stated his expectation that the department would give him its “full and active support.” Moffat later learned from the French minister that Osusky had never relinquished his post. Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 23, 1939, 4; Hurban’s most outlandish talk came on April 25, though, when he relayed to Moffat the news of a Czech official who had kidnapped his American child, only to have the child kidnapped back. “A veritable domestic drama,” Moffat recorded. Moffat, diplomatic journal. April 25, 1939, 3.

²⁶ Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, 100. By mid-summer, the excitement of such free rein seemed to have worn off, as Kennan, in a letter to William Bullitt, ambassador to France, said, “It is a rather lonely job I have out here and I have little opportunity to exchange opinions with anyone else.” Kennan to Bullitt, July 26, 1939, William Bullitt C. Papers, Box 44, Yale University, 3.

²⁷ Kennan, “Report on the New Regime in Bohemia and Moravia,” March 29, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 94.

²⁸ Kennan, “Memoirs Part II: Munich to Occupation,” 1939, 11.

general in Prague, relations with Protectorate officials, whether Czech or German, were good and straightforward (apart from the exequatur fiasco). Kennan, on the other hand, encountered frustrating obstacles. Whenever he requested meetings or interviews with German officials, which he framed to them as an opportunity to understand the Reich point-of-view, they responded vaguely, saying that nothing like that could be done for the time being, but that the situation might change in a few months.²⁹ Czech officials, too, were eager to keep their distance. For example, once when Linnell had a meeting with Hacha, the latter requested that Kennan not come along, fearing that Kennan's former status as a diplomatic officer would complicate Czech-German relations. On other occasions, Czech officials cancelled meetings and dinners with Kennan, likely on account of his diplomatic ties. Such difficulties eventually prompted Kennan to wonder whether someone else, one without his unique baggage, could better report from the Protectorate. The department, however, never considered making a change.³⁰

In late-March, in one of his first reports from the Protectorate, Kennan sent a long message to the department outlining the new form government and administration that the Germans were establishing in Bohemia and Moravia. While the Wehrmacht retained control for the time being, the Czechs eventually formed their own autonomous government, albeit with no parliament. Hacha remained president, and the Germans continued to afford him the honor and dignity associated thereof, at least on paper. Yet while the Czech Protectorate government was to be nominally in charge of domestic concerns, it had no jurisdiction in more significant matters,

²⁹ Linnell to Hull, July 13, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. II, 415.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Linnell informed the department of Kennan's belief that another officer, one who had not served in Prague as a diplomat, might be in a better position to report from the Protectorate. Since Kennan enjoyed immensely his work during spring and summer 1939 in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, it can only be assumed that he truly felt that his abilities as a political reporter were severely handicapped by his former diplomatic status. Though Linnell sent this dispatch in mid-July, the department did not receive it, at least officially, until mid-August. By that time, Kennan would only serve two more weeks before the war began, at which time the department transferred him to Berlin.

particularly foreign affairs and economic planning, which were to be handled from Berlin. Meanwhile, in conjunction with the autonomous government, Germany also established the Reichsprotektor's office, which was to be led by two men who could hardly have been more different. At the helm was Constantin von Neurath, an old, dignified statesman better suited for the pre-Nazi era. His number two was to be Karl Frank, a vicious Sudeten Nazi, of whom Kennan could not tell whether "his ruthless zeal is the result of political ambition or of a self-righteous belief in the innate sinfulness of the Czechs."³¹ The job of Neurath's administration was to oversee and supervise the autonomous Czech government while serving as the Reich's official outpost. Despite this limited job description, there was never any question as to where final authority lay in the Protectorate.

The announcement that Neurath was to serve as the Protectorate's Reich Protector came a few weeks after the occupation. The State Department considered the appointment to be a "polite" move on Hitler's part.³² Neurath, who had served as Germany's foreign minister from 1933-1938, had built for himself a respectable reputation among foreign observers and governments, as noted by Kennan. While he carried a profound sense of duty to his homeland, he was at the same time averse to fanaticism, thought Ribbentrop to be a dangerous idiot, and saw himself as a limiting factor to Hitler's aggressive policy.³³ After carrying out the occupation, Hitler favored Neurath's conciliatory style over anything that could be deemed fanatical or aggressive, as he hoped to secure peace and quiet in Bohemia and Moravia, and then the

³¹ Kennan, "Developments in Bohemia and Moravia," August 19, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 218.

³² Geist to Hull, telegram no. 654, March 25, 1939, NARA, RG 59, microfilm M1218, roll 15, 860F.00/617.

³³ Initially, Neurath did not want to accept the position of Reichsprotektor, but Hitler threatened that, if Neurath were to reject it, then he would leave the task of appointing a Reichsprotektor to Ribbentrop. "You know what that will mean," warned Hitler, adding that "you will bear full responsibility for whatever happens." John Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister: Constantin Freiherr von Neurath* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1979), 1-6 and 189.

subsequent integration of Czechs into the German Empire.³⁴ To achieve this, Hitler considered Neurath the best possible option.³⁵ Hitler hoped that providing the Czech's a measure of autonomy would prompt places like Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria to lean into the German orbit themselves, or even become willing satellites.³⁶

Neurath was initially optimistic about his job in the Protectorate. He spoke about restraining anti-Czech and anti-German elements in Bohemia and Moravia, and he reinforced the notion that Germany's role in the Protectorate was not one of conquest and that the Czechs were to be treated firmly but fairly.³⁷ While he saw it as his purpose to destroy Czech will for national self-determination, he considered it crucial to encourage Czechs to retain their culture and heritage. The result, Neurath hoped, would be the successful integration of the Czech lands into the Reich. While Neurath personally sympathized with the sufferings of minorities, he stood firm in the belief that national identifications, such as those of Czechs and Slovaks, must be overcome if lasting peace were to be achieved in Europe, and especially Central Europe.³⁸

Interestingly, Kennan's views on the Protectorate mirrored in some ways the "dignified" outlook of Neurath.³⁹ Kennan was hardly inclined to long for the return of the pre-Munich,

³⁴ Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Frank, and other fanatical Nazis loathed Neurath's philosophy on German foreign policy and demeanor. In his diary, after Neurath's appointment to Reichsprotektor, Goebbels wrote, "This man has nothing in common with us." Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, 194.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 187-190.

³⁶ Kennan, "Developments in Bohemia and Moravia," May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 168.

³⁷ Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, 191.

³⁸ Specifically in regard to the Czechs, Neurath argued that "If we permit the average man his individuality in his private life, in speaking his native tongue, or worshipping God by local traditions, and at the same time show him the nearly unlimited advances open to him within the wide borders of Greater Germany, he will turn to these possibilities and forswear political games...it is possible that within a relatively short time—perhaps on one or two generations—the Czech nation will sink into the insignificance of an historical curiosity." As quoted in Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, 199-200.

³⁹ Kennan rarely speaks in detail about Neurath in his reports, apart from analyses of the internal struggle between Neurath's "moderates" and Frank's "radicals." Generally, Kennan seemed to view Neurath as a responsible and respectable figure who sincerely wanted the Czechs and Germans to function side-by-side. That being said, Kennan never put much stock in Neurath's ability to achieve such, calling him "inactive" and depicting him as powerless in the face of Frank. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 218 and 238.

democratic Czechoslovakia. That experiment, regardless of Czech successes and French betrayals, had ultimately proven unworkable. Both the Slovaks and “backwards” Ruthenes naturally belonged to Hungary, and it would be foolish, argued Kennan, to again imbed them under Czech rule, however egalitarian that rule might be. Yet Kennan did not think that an independent Czech state was the answer, either. What he really thought best, and what he believed would bring lasting stability to Central Europe, was a genuine coexistence of Germans and Czechs and the reemergence of a strong, Danubian empire. Much like Neurath, Kennan believed that a German occupation executed in the correct way could solicit benefits for all involved. It should be noted, however, that for Kennan, and even for Neurath, this hypothetical ‘correct’ occupation could probably not be under the auspices of the Nazi regime’s fanatical fringes. Rather, calmer and wiser forces in the Nazi party would need to prevail. It seemed like a tall order, but Neurath’s appointment lent some hope that if the German occupation was “firm in its purpose, conscious of its responsibilities, integrated in its activities, and incorruptible in the performance of its duties, there would be less cause for misgivings. Granted such an administration on the part of the Germans, Bohemia and Moravia could look forward even to complete incorporation in the Reich...and a tolerable economic future.”⁴⁰

Initially, during the earliest stage of the occupation, before the Czech autonomous government had been established and before Neurath had assumed his position, Kennan was quite optimistic. He considered German behavior mild and often conciliatory. Though the Gestapo and SS had followed the invasion by making thousands of arrests, most were released after a day’s detention. Furthermore, by the end of the month, still not one prominent Czech had

⁴⁰ Kennan, “Developments in Bohemia and Moravia,” May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 169.

been molested, although many had lost jobs.⁴¹ The attitude of the Wehrmacht toward the Czech lands also signaled potential for a good occupation. Prior to the March 15 invasion, Nazi leaders had long been telling the Wehrmacht soldiers sent to occupy Bohemia and Moravia lies about what they would find—they had been “filled up with tales of disorder and misery.” Thus, when they at last moved into the Protectorate territory, the reality of the situation could not have been more different, and for the Germans, could not have been more pleasant. Kennan, after a day of walking Prague’s streets, noted “the obvious enjoyment and astonishment with which the German officers and men set about to consume Bohemian food and to purchase Bohemian goods has created a deep impression on everyone who has witnessed it...Prague shops and restaurants have done a thriving business...people vie in the repetition of tales of the gargantuan exploits of German officers and men in the local restaurants and beer halls.”⁴²

Kennan’s conviction that Bohemia and Moravia were experiencing a relatively tame occupation was not uniformly held, but it was certainly proving less intense than the brutality that followed the Anschluss.⁴³ Always the realist, Kennan also sought to counteract press reports which he felt were “inclined to exaggerate the horrors of these first two weeks of Germany occupation.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kennan, personal letter, March 30, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 103. When compared to SS brutality during and after the Anschluss, Kennan found Germany’s behavior in Bohemia and Moravia especially mild.

⁴² Kennan, “Letter on the Protectorate,” April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 116. A.R. Parker of the *New York Times* reached a similar conclusion: “...German troops were fed with lies about unrest and anti-German riots here before they marched, so that the commanding officers asked local Mayors to take them to the scenes of massacres—which never occurred—and brought wreaths to honor the graves of Germans—who never died.” A.R. Parker, “Czechs and Slovaks Are Now Deeply Stirred,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1939, 61.

⁴³ To most scholars, Kennan’s initial account of the German occupation is unduly optimistic. Evidence suggests that with the occupation came normal Nazi terror, particularly against Jews, Social Democrats, and those known to have opposed the Nazi regime. David Mayers, “Nazi Germany and the Future of Europe: George Kennan’s Views, 1939-1945,” *The International History Review* 8, no. 4 (1986): 555.

⁴⁴ Kennan, personal letter, March 30, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 103.

It did not take long, however, for Kennan to lose all confidence in Germany's ability to integrate the Czech lands into the Reich. Early decisions by German officials made Kennan question the soundness of Berlin's judgment in the way it administered the Protectorate. For instance, one of its first moves was to appoint Konrad Henlein, the former leader of the Sudeten Germans during the Munich crisis, as civil minister of Bohemia. In the minds of Czechs, few individuals were more culpable for the tragedies that befell Czechoslovakia in 1938 than Henlein, and they despised him for it. The idea that he was now to lord over them in a position of leadership was downright acidic. Moffat called it the "cruellest cut of all," while the American papers dubbed it a premeditated humiliation.⁴⁵ Kennan agreed, informing the department that Berlin could not have chosen a better leader to harden Czech hostility and suspicion. While Henlein's appointment may have brought satisfaction to Sudeten Nazis, Reich officials did not want a hostile Czech population, but rather peace, quiet, and as few bad feelings as possible. The move made no sense, and for an answer Kennan could only point to "the obscure depths of internal Nazi party politics."⁴⁶ German leadership seemed to realize its mistake soon enough, for by the end of March, Kennan could report that Henlein had seemed to reach his "eclipse," no longer appearing in public or having his signature on published decrees.⁴⁷ He was transferred out of the Protectorate later that spring. The clumsy move was not a good start.

Worse than Henlein, though, were the efforts of fringe Nazis to wrest control from the proper chain-of-command, foremost of whom was Karl Frank. Czech officials greeted Neurath's appointment to the position of Reichsprotektor with leery caution. While they may have been

⁴⁵ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 16, 1939; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Stunned Nations in the Nazi Shadow," *New York Times*, March 26, 1939, 108.

⁴⁶ Kennan, "Report on the New Regime in Bohemia and Moravia," March 29, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 96.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

relieved by Neurath's statesmanlike character and the knowledge that he would offer a fairer shake to the Protectorate, they had very little confidence in Neurath's ability to impose his way, especially in the face of fanatics such as Frank, as well as the endless slew of Sudeten and Austrian Nazis, who had descended upon the Protectorate in the name of opportunism and cronyism.⁴⁸ Such radicals had already entrenched themselves in local positions of power.⁴⁹ Thus, it did not take long for Kennan to see that, on the whole, German occupiers were indecisive, immoral, and plagued by relentless internal rivalries. Quickly, then, the outworking of the German occupation became none too enticing to Czech observers, and Kennan concluded that "one can predict no successful future for the German attempt to rule the Historic Provinces."⁵⁰ Kennan confirmed the Czechs' concern that Neurath would not effectively hold sway, for when Neurath left Prague soon after assuming office to attend to prolonged business in Berlin, Kennan did not consider it significant, for through Frank and his ilk, "German domination [was] complete."⁵¹

Frank and the radical Nazis notwithstanding, the gap between Kennan's views of the Germans and Czechs in the Protectorate widened as the occupation took shape. Already an admirer of the Czech people, Kennan came to appreciate the ways in which they resisted German occupation, the likes of which were on full display during the day of Neurath's official arrival in

⁴⁸ Kennan, "The situation in Bohemia and Moravia," June 6, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 179. Heineman writes that Neurath's approach to policy and decision-making was extremely passive. He often felt it best to let situations play out without decisive action. This led many contemporaries to understand Neurath as being lazy and uninterested. Heineman pushes back against this notion, although he does admit that Neurath's style did not do him many favors when administering in the Protectorate. Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, 3.

⁴⁹ On the difficulties that Neurath faced in the Protectorate, Heineman writes, "Almost from the first, however, Neurath discovered the difference between Hitler's order for an autonomous Protectorate, and the practical realities in Bohemia and Moravia. Preceded into the country by a horde of German officials (many from the Sudetenland) who ensconced themselves in positions throughout municipal, county, and central governments, Neurath was at once locked in a battle against men who enjoyed the support of the party and State Secretary Frank." Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, 191.

⁵⁰ Kennan, "Developments in Bohemia and Moravia," May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 170-171.

⁵¹ Kennan, "Letter on the Protectorate," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 114.

Prague on April 5.⁵² The Germans made a big deal of it, declaring it a public holiday and transporting trainloads of Sudeten Germans to thicken the crowds. The Czechs responded to compulsory participation with “real resentment,” said Kennan, and they found little ways to rebel. For instance, since Czech school children were to be gathered by their teachers and placed along the route of Neurath’s procession, many parents kept their children home for the day. Other homes, not wanting to comply with the authorities’ orders to fly the Nazi or Czech flag, simply paid the six-hundred-crown fine.⁵³ The culmination of the day’s lackluster feel came when only four or five hundred Germans, no Czechs, showed up for the evening’s torchlight parade. The failed attempt at pomp left a strong impression on Kennan. It seemed that the Germans, for all their references to ancient shared history and the Holy Roman Empire, were utterly ignorant of the very real differences between Germans and Czechs, and especially psychological differences. What worked on the German people might not work so easily on Czechs: “the success which flags and drums and torchlights have had in stirring enthusiasm among their own people may...have misled them into the hope that the same effect could easily be achieved among the Czechs.”⁵⁴

Kennan, though extremely doubtful that such “fan fares” would bridge the psychological and linguistic gaps, was not primarily concerned with the attempts in-and-of themselves, but

⁵² Kennan’s attitude toward Czechs and Germans is interesting. Due to formative experiences in his youth and early career, he held a deep-rooted admiration for the German people, language, and culture. He writes in his memoirs, though, that he arrived in Prague “devoid of any sympathy for the Nazis.” Kennan, *Memoirs*, 93-94. His writings from the time he spent in Berlin following Prague, in which he empathizes with normal German citizens, suggests he drew a clear distinction between Germans and Nazis. This was also seen in his writings from the Protectorate, in which he often distinguished Frank’s type from the Wehrmacht or those like Neurath. In regard to the Czechs, Kennan writes that he came to Prague with unpleasant memories of their “narrow linguistic nationalism,” but his travel journals indicate that he came to love and admire the people and geography of the Czech lands: “Everything that I encountered, not only in Prague but in Bohemia and Moravia in general, was strangely understandable and poignant.” Kennan, “Memoirs Part II: Munich to Occupation,” 11.

⁵³ Kennan, “Arrival of Baron von Neurath,” April 7, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 111-112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

with how they suggested Germany's bankrupt approach to occupation and Germanization.⁵⁵ Its inability to offer a legitimate method for pulling Germans and Czechs together "is an omen of equal sadness for Czechs and Germans alike."⁵⁶ The ceremony was also meant to reinforce the fiction that "Baron von Neurath was arriving in response to the spontaneous request of a Czech nation thirsty for order and protection after years of insecurity and misgovernment."⁵⁷ Czechs and German soldiers alike knew this to be false, adding a measure of self-delusion to the German occupation.

Kennan, already unimpressed with Germany's approach to the occupation, found little encouragement in other aspects of Berlin's methods, such as its control of the Protectorate's press. Strict censorship was put in place immediately, but that was to be expected. Czech papers could only run the most mundane and colorless stories so as to spare German feelings, and the bulk of their front-page coverage they received from the "busy minions of Dr. Goebbels."⁵⁸ The intermixing of Czech ambivalence and Reich propaganda led to some amusing setups in news coverage. For instance, Kennan noted one paper which ran two front-page stories. The headline on the bottom of the page claimed to share "fourteen lies of the democratic press," with no. 11 being the supposed invasion of Memel. This was not true, the paper argued. The only problem was that the story right above it, one with a "screaming" headline, boasted the exciting news that the Germans had successfully occupied Memel.⁵⁹ Czech citizens enjoyed these failures for how

⁵⁵ The Germans did seem to learn from their failed attempt at making the Czechs celebrate their successes. When Hitler's birthday came around later in the month, Czech participation in the day's festivities was voluntary. Kennan, "Celebration of Hitler's Birthday in Prague," April 21, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 129.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Kennan, "Arrival in Prague of Baron von Neurath," April 7, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 113.

⁵⁸ Kennan, "Letter on the Protectorate," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 114-115.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115. Kennan shared another story about a paper which devoted four pages to denouncing Britain's needless alarm over the fate of Poland—nothing was going to happen, said the Germans. Then, on the fifth page, the first headline gloated, "Surprise Is Half the Victory."

they made the Germans appear sloppy. Censorship demoralized the Czech populace in other ways, though. For instance, in the spring, Czech theaters could no longer show American films, a cultural blow to a region where 54% of its foreign film intake came from American productions.⁶⁰

At times, Kennan found the incompetence of the German occupiers to be downright funny. In one report, he recalled a recent trip he had taken to a Prague beer garden. It was a “warm summer evening,” and some Czech students, after having had too much to drink, began venting their frustrations with the German occupation by sarcastically shouting “we want colonies” and “colonies for the Czechs.” Other Czech patrons, appreciating the humor, joined in, and according to Kennan, for some time the entire beer garden echoed with defiant demands for Czech *lebensraum*.⁶¹ Already an amusing night, then, the perfect capper came when two Germans, who had been sitting alone at a table as the scene unfolded, became very excited at what they were witnessing. Thinking they had discovered real Czech sympathy for Berlin’s foreign policies, the two quickly left the garden to share the important news with a German paper editor, who then rattled off a “serious and significant” article which, by citing the beer garden incident, claimed that reasonable Czechs did in fact understand the benefits that would come from Germany restoring its colonial empire.⁶²

The beer garden scene touched on an important issue for both Kennan and Washington: Germany’s foreign policy. The Germans were eager to not only subdue the Czech people, but to also garner the populace’s approval and momentum for an expansionist policy—to make Germans out of the Czechs, and to use the transformation as a springboard to the east. The notion

⁶⁰ Associated Press, “Czechs Due to Lose American Films,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1939, 15.

⁶¹ Kennan, “The Situation in the Protectorate,” July 17, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 209.

⁶² *Ibid.*

that Hitler was only warming up in regard to *lebensraum* worried the department and administration greatly. In mid-April, Roosevelt sent personal messages to Hitler and Mussolini, asking them to make a ten-year pledge of non-aggression applicable to Europe and the Near East.⁶³ Hitler and Mussolini ignored the plea, and their respective presses hailed it ‘dumb,’ while most European countries, though unofficially supportive, chose to make no official response because Germany was angry and unfortunately nearby.⁶⁴ The message meant the world to the Czechs, though.⁶⁵ Hurban telephoned Moffat and extolled the president’s “terrific” effort to which Berlin and Rome “had no answer.”⁶⁶ Hurban was worried, though, as Roosevelt’s message made no reference to Czechoslovakia. He and Benes, who had been in close contact with the minister, wanted to be sure that the United States had not experienced a change-of-heart in regard to the extinguished nation. Moffat assured him that nothing of the sort had occurred.⁶⁷

The new Czech government did not come into existence until early May. Contrary to Kennan’s expectations, it was filled with holdovers from the Beran government.⁶⁸ The major

⁶³ Rauch, *Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 116-117 and “The President’s Appeal,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1939, B8.

⁶⁴ For European responses to Roosevelt’s messages, see *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. I, 408-419. Greece’s reply is representative of such: “The Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs has asked me to communicate confidentially that the reaction of the Greek Government to the President’s appeal is one of enthusiastic approval but that it hesitates to make a public announcement of this fact in view of Greece’s exposed position. . . . He told me that Germany has, since the publication of the President’s message, asked the Greek Government to say categorically whether it feels menaced by Germany, and that forcibly the reply has had to be no.” MacVeagh to Hull, April 19, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. I, 135.

⁶⁵ Louis Lochner, “Berlin Papers Term Message ‘Dumb,’ ‘Misdirected;’ Hint Fear of Betrayal,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1939, 1.

⁶⁶ Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 17, 1939, 1. Hurban’s excitement aside, Mussolini and Hitler did in fact answer Roosevelt’s telegram in planned speeches. Hitler gave his speech to the Reichstag on April 28, 1939, in which he strongly rejected Roosevelt’s proposal. “Roosevelt Plans No Reply to Hitler,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1939, 3.

⁶⁷ Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 17, 1939, 1-2. Though the messages did not mention Czechoslovakia specifically, they did remind readers that “three nations in Europe and one in Africa have seen their independent existence terminated.” Roosevelt to Hitler, April 14, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, General, Vol. I, 120.

⁶⁸ Kennan, “The New Regime in Bohemia and Moravia,” March 29, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 98. In the immediate aftermath of the occupation, Kennan remarked, “Not only will there presumably have to be a reclassification of portfolios but the personal composition of the body will probably have to be largely—if not entirely—changed. It is probable that most of the present ministers will be replaced with men heretofore little known to Czech political life.”

changes resulted from the fact that two prominent positions, Defense and Foreign Affairs, were outright abolished, as was expected. Chvalkovsky, the man most responsible for the gradual capitulation that marked the Second Republic, went to Berlin to serve as the Czech Minister.⁶⁹ Apart from Chvalkovsky's transfer, the only other prominent change came in Rudolf Beran, the former prime minister, being replaced by Alois Elias. Along with Kennan, the public was shocked at the lack of turnover, and most concluded it meant that the Protectorate government would be a temporary one. Kennan considered such to be the most logical answer, and he felt that if the continent's hostilities were set loose, a possibility that was looking more likely, then Germany would ditch the idea of a Protectorate and establish full political control.⁷⁰

That time had not yet come, though, and in his reporting, Kennan went to great pains to flesh out the Protectorate's complex power dynamics. On the one hand, Kennan claimed that German domination over the region was complete. However, at the same time, he also attached major value to the Czech Protectorate government: "the moral effect of the Protectorate should not be dismissed too lightly...it is equivalent, furthermore, to a promissory note from the Germans for the preservation of Czech culture and national pride, a symbol of at least the *professed* intention of the Germans to treat the Czech nation with respect."⁷¹ Furthermore, it had only been twenty years since a time when the Czechs were still under Austrian rule, argued Kennan, a time when they could hardly have dreamed of possessing a 'Protectorate'

⁶⁹ Chvalkovsky's position in Berlin was analogous to ministers representing Germany's various states. Kennan, "New Government in the Protectorate," May 4, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 144.

⁷⁰ Kennan, "New Government of the Protectorate," May 4, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 146-147. Kennan also commented on rumors that Goering wanted to do away with the Protectorate so that he could more easily incorporate Bohemia and Moravia into Germany's Four-Year economic plan. As Carr had long predicted, Kennan guessed that an occupation would result in German-speaking enclaves, such as Brno, Olomouc, Pilsen, and Moravska-Ostrava, being officially incorporated into the Reich.

⁷¹ Kennan, "Developments in Bohemia and Moravia," May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 169. Italics Kennan's.

government.⁷² A functioning protectorate, then, might be sufficient for most Czechs, thought Kennan. If the Germans were to completely abolish the Protectorate system, Kennan argued that the “rift between Czechs and Germans, already tragically wide, becomes irreparable.”

One of the Protectorate government’s first goals was to consolidate the Czech people under the banner of a single solidarity movement, the National Community. The Beran cabinet had attempted this during the Second Republic, but the political cliques and old party clubs remained entrenched. To Kennan, this was the natural inclination for the Czechs. “The Czechs take to political parties like ducks to water,” he said in a March message to the department. Later, at summer’s end, he would write confidently that the people of Bohemia and Moravia, beyond seeing democracy as a thoroughly discredited model, would also refuse a return to “squabbling political parties,” but this shift in thinking had not yet fully manifested.⁷³ Kennan seemed to believe that the dissolution of factions and a general ‘coming together’ of the Czech people were crucial to the region’s survival. To his liking, the National Community gained traction throughout the spring, thanks to various political machines joining its ranks after “prolonged heart-searching,” as well as the efforts of “intelligent people” to persuade the public at large that Czech morale and unity could only weather months or years of German domination if the Czech people pulled together.⁷⁴

Kennan closely followed the efforts of the Czech populace, in addition to the National Community, to preserve its own culture and national feeling. Czech demonstrations, which doubled as ways of venting disapproval of the German occupation, were both spontaneous and

⁷² Ibid., 169.

⁷³ Kennan, “Developments in Bohemia and Moravia,” in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 224. He expounded on Czechoslovakia’s “squabbling parties” with a colorful simile: “For many years the Czech political parties have sat around the board and split any and all political spoils with the exactitude of small boys dividing a stolen melon.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 99.

⁷⁴ Kennan, “Report on the New Regime,” March 29, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 99.

carefully executed. Kennan considered these methods ingenious.⁷⁵ A favorite demonstration of the Czechs was to place bouquets of flowers at prominent graves and statues. In early May, for example, Kennan reported that thousands of citizens in Prague had left flowers at monuments commemorating John Hus, the fifteenth-century reformer, and Woodrow Wilson, who in the minds of many Czechs had helped realize the movement Hus had started. The Germans, of course, did not like these outward displays of Czech solidarity, but as Kennan noted, it was difficult to arrest individuals for visiting public monuments.⁷⁶

Other demonstrations recorded by Kennan were more overt. While the monuments of Hus and Wilson were receiving newfound love and attention, a group of Czechs moved the remains of Karel Macha, a beloved Czech poet, from the Sudetenland to the Hrad's cemetery where many of the country's greatest figures were buried. The spontaneous event garnered thousands of participators, and for occasions such as this, Czechs around the country proved much more willing to display the red, white, and blue tricolors than when the German specifically asked them to, which Reich officials found extremely annoying.⁷⁷ Even in Moravska-Ostrava, a frontier city exposed to stronger attempts of Germanization, Reich officials had to officially forbid anyone from wearing badges with the inscriptions "we will not surrender" and "Benes is not asleep."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Kennan, "The Political Situation in Bohemia," May 11, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 157-158.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 159. As Kennan explained in his report to the department, Hus was a Protestant reformer who opposed Austrian Catholicism and was ultimately burned at the stake for his positions. He thus became an important symbol of Czech nationalism and opposition to the Habsburg Empire. Tomas Masaryk, a sort of secular Protestant, closely aligned the Czechoslovak independence movement with remembrance and celebration of Hus. Masaryk championed Protestant values throughout his presidency even though the majority of Czechoslovakia remained Catholic. See FROM PRAGUE AFTER MUNICH. Gordon Skilling, "Academic Iconoclast T.G. Masaryk; Professor and Pedagogue," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 32, no. 1 (1990): 18-40.

⁷⁷ Kennan, "The Political Situation in Bohemia," May 11, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 159.

⁷⁸ Kennan, "Letter on the Protectorate," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 118.

Interestingly, the Czech officials in charge observed these demonstrations of national solidarity with extreme uneasiness. The Czechs were already on thin ice due to the fruits of Hacha's labors to enlist the populace into support of the Protectorate's single party, the National Community. At first, the Germans liked the idea and pushed Hacha forward and in a spirit of National Socialism. However, when 97% of eligible Czech males voted in favor of the party, with the National Community securing 120% support in some districts, the Germans determined that Hacha's party was *too* effective and that the Protectorate government ought to use its apparent control of national feeling to increase the populace's love and appreciation for all things German.⁷⁹ Kennan also assumed that Germany, always looking for a minority to incite and embolden, feared that the National Community's popularity left no room for agitated outsiders, thus eliminating potential pretext for abolishing the Protectorate altogether.⁸⁰

Kennan saw the psychology of Czech resistance as one of realism, patience, and bitterness intermixed with ambivalence. He also drew parallels to when the Czechs resisted Austrian rule in the twilight years of the Habsburg Empire. While they demonstrated a "baffling willingness to comply with any and all demands," said Kennan, they boasted an "equally baffling ability to execute them in such a way that the effect is quite different" from what the German expected or hoped.⁸¹ Still, no Czech seriously expected to shake off German political control in the immediate future. Like what happened in 1918, the Czechs settled to wait for another world

⁷⁹ Kennan, "The Political Situation in Bohemia," May 11, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 158-159. How was it that some districts received more than 100% turnout? Kennan guessed that Czechs returning from Slovakia and Ruthenia added to the percentages, as well as former military personnel who would not have been included in voting lists. In Brno, where one of the highest percentages was tallied, Kennan considered it likely that people of other nationalities, particularly Germans, voted in support of the Czech cause. It is especially interesting that this happened in Brno, which, as a German-language enclave, was one of the cities that experienced the Reich's most intensive Germanization efforts.

⁸⁰ Kennan, "Developments in Bohemia and Moravia," May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 168.

⁸¹ Kennan, "Letter on the Protectorate," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 117-118.

war, which alone could restore their freedoms and independence. “There is probably no country in Europe,” wrote Kennan, “where war...is so universally desired as in the Protectorate.”⁸²

While Kennan appreciated the subtle but effective resistance exhibited by the Czechs, he also observed in them a sober recognition of their difficult situation, or what Kennan called Prague’s “universal sense of impending disaster.”⁸³ Being in touch with well-informed circles, Kennan reported that few Czechs believed that they would be able to consolidate any salvageable identity in the near future. Interestingly, though, the disaster that Czech citizens feared was not most of all war. Rather, they feared that war would not come soon enough, opening the door for the Germans to “cope in peace” and undertake its Germanization project in Bohemia and Moravia with ample time and space. What the Czechs really feared, then, was the systematic “disintegration of public life.”⁸⁴

Amid the fear and apathy that typified portions of the Czech population, there were other aspects of the Czech’s passive resistance that Kennan appreciated. One was their sense of humor. “Among themselves and with their friends,” recorded Kennan, “they treat the whole situation with that dry, ironic humor to which their language so easily lends itself.”⁸⁵ Later in the summer, when Czech resistance gained greater confidence, Kennan reported the myriad ways in which the Protectorate’s citizens sought to use small, humorous acts to undermine German authority. Under the cover of a theater’s darkness, people blurted out wisecracks during the German newsreels

⁸² Ibid. Four months later, at the end of Kennan’s time in the Protectorate, he would reiterate the same point: “Bohemia and Moravia remain among the few places in the world where a war is earnestly desired.” Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 223.

⁸³ Kennan, “Developments in Bohemia and Moravia,” May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 165.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Kennan, “Letter on the Protectorate,” April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 118. Current research has explored the role of Czech humor and joke-telling during the occupation years, showing that far from being just a coping mechanism, it served as a real, though peculiar, form of resistance. See Chad Bryant, “The Language of Resistance? Czech Jokes and Joke-Telling under Nazi Occupation, 1943-1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 133-151.

that played before movies. Restaurant waiters took joy in infuriating German patrons by handing them their German newspapers upside down. Bolder still was their tendency to place hammer and sickle stickers on the parked cars of German citizens.⁸⁶

The Czechs' ability to passively resist German efforts seemed applicable to almost any sphere, at least from Kennan's vantage point. Often however, it was pettiness, opportunism, and ambivalence that marked both Czech and German behavior, resulting in a half-amusing, half-sad game of tug-of-war. That is exactly what Kennan witnessed when the "Bayrischer Hilfszug," or 'Bavarian Aid-Train,' came to Prague for humanitarian relief. The purpose of the outfit, or at least what Kennan surmised, was to demonstrate well-being for the starving elements of the Czech population until the new regime and its systems could begin providing bread and work for everyone, as German officials assured it would.⁸⁷ Czech welfare authorities, noticing an opportunity, proceeded to sell to the Hilfszug the very supplies which they would have given to needy peoples themselves. As the Czechs made a bit of profit, the Bavarians lost no time in capturing their wondrous deeds for the press. They asked Czech children to demonstrate their prayers, snapping photos of them on their knees and arms held high. With the morning papers came the photos of the children and the obvious conclusion that they were, in fact, begging their deliverers for food. Within a week, though, the juxtaposition of the Hilfszug's efforts with German soldiers "stuffing themselves" was too much for locals to handle, and the Bavarian Aid-Train packed up and returned home.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Kennan, "The Situation in the Protectorate," July 17, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 209. Many Czechs also altered their car license tags, which previously said "CRS" (Czechoslovak Republic), to say "USSR."

⁸⁷ Kennan, "Letter on the Protectorate," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 117. Kennan compared the situation to the Russian fable of the fly "who rode on the oxen's nose all day and greeted the villagers in the evening with the announcement: 'We've been ploughing.'"

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

While the Czechs and Germans tried to outdo one another in exploiting the refugee problem in Bohemia and Moravia, back in Washington the U.S. government's attempts to alleviate the refugee crisis in the Czech lands failed outright. Since the Anschluss, the United States, along with Britain and other League nations, perpetually sponsored the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, which had since its inception been trying to resettle displaced persons from Germany. Unfortunately, the committee was constantly bogged down by Berlin's utter uncooperativeness. Unable to make much headway in Germany, it could do less for the Czech lands.⁸⁹ Then, in April, Congress deliberated over the Wagner-Rogers bill, which aimed to increase immigration quotas to allow twenty-thousand German children, mostly Jews, to come to the United States. Madame Hurban, the minister's wife, wanted to go before Congress herself in order to sway her listeners that children from Bohemia and Moravia ought to be included in the bill as well.⁹⁰ The department, though sympathetic, worried that by allowing a diplomat's wife to testify in Congress, they would be setting a dangerous precedent. She never did appear before the committees, and the bill died in Congress anyway.⁹¹

The Czechs' unseemly willingness to exploit humanitarian aid for profit was not the only example of resistance through opportunism. Kennan also noted such cases in Bohemia's financial sphere. Upon their arrival, the Germans, desiring to extract as much juice from the Czech economy as possible, imposed a dangerously generous exchange rate on Czech crowns

⁸⁹ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 23, 1939, 2-4.

⁹⁰ Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 21, 1939, 1.

⁹¹ The bill never came to a vote due to opposition in the Senate from those who opposed any increase in immigration. Neither the State Department or administration could intervene as Roosevelt needed to court strategic votes for revised neutrality and rearmament. "Bill to Shut Out Aliens is Reported," *New York Times*, July 1, 1939, 3. Dorothy Thompson was one of the bill's staunchest advocates, arguing that "the bill will be opposed by the timid, by those who think we live on a different planet from the rest of the world and that the whole earth can be chaotic without its affecting us, and it will be opposed by those who believe that the principles to which this country gives allegiance—the ideals of liberty and human rights—ceased to have validity along about 1781. Thompson, "The Wagner-Rogers Bill," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1939, 9.

and printed Czech moneys with abandon. The Czechs, rather than attempting to stave off these measures, dove headlong into economic recklessness and began printing crowns without restraint, hoping to get their fair shake before leaving a mess that the Germans, not the Czechs, would have to mop up. “The ship has been taken by pirates, and the crew are quietly opening the pet-cocks,” explained one Czech official to Kennan.⁹² This mentality spread rapidly among Czech officials, and by spring Kennan reported that

the Czechs are entering with complete abandon into the spirit of what they consider to be a desperate situation. Even Czech officials who have heretofore been relatively honest now take bribes with complete unconcern, and their superiors look on with approval, feeling that the greater the disintegration of the integrity of the administration, the more difficult things will be for the Germans. Sloppiness, irresponsibility, passive resistance are becoming universal. The result is an atmosphere of outward submission and inner demoralization which defies description and the inevitable consequences of which are not pleasant to contemplate.⁹³

The Protectorate’s economics became a battleground for earning the populace’s favor. As the Germans tightened their grip on Czech finances, they hoped that inflationary prices, which resulted in expedient monetary benefits for the average Czech, would win over families to the German side. Czech officials were split, with some arguing that the National Community would in fact receive credit for the short-term benefits of inflation, while others pressed that it should do its best to adhere to orthodox economic practices. The only thing Kennan was sure of was that Germany would maintain the status quo until external events forced them to do otherwise.⁹⁴

By the end of May and continuing until the start of the war, Kennan reported the deterioration of Czech-German relations in Bohemia and Moravia. Much of this, argued Kennan, was the result of the ongoing internal battle between the Reich’s top two officials in the

⁹² Kennan, “Developments in Bohemia and Moravia,” May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 166.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁴ Kennan, “The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia,” June 6, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 187.

Protectorate, Neurath and Frank, and the latter's ability to continually come out on top. Under Frank, the German commissars who had assumed local leadership in the immediate aftermath of the occupation that wielded "all the real power" in the Protectorate, and Berlin made no attempt to alter this fact.⁹⁵ In many instances, the Sudeten and Austrian Nazis abandoned all pretense of Czech autonomy, kicking out Czech officials and securing all posts for themselves. This was a serious problem for Czechs, said Kennan, as most of the Sudeten Nazis had "personal axes to grind" and unleashed their worst instincts on local Czech populaces.⁹⁶ The SS and Gestapo maintained a presence in most sizable Czech communities despite not having any legal justification for doing so. Prisons filled and overflowed, and Kennan, leaving behind the optimism he held at the start of the occupation, informed the department that "it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that "terror," in the accepted totalitarian sense, had now begun, and that the Czech authorities are quite powerless to oppose it."⁹⁷ The behavior of the Sudeten and Austrian Nazis drew Kennan's serious ire, who claimed that, like they had ruined Czech-Austrian relations, the radical elements of the Nazi party were now poisoning Czech-German relations beyond repair, and with them, any chance for a healthy solution in the Protectorate.

Not only were Czech officials powerless, but Kennan also felt that Neurath could do little to curb Frank and his cronies. In early June, Neurath, to Czech officials' delight, visited with Hitler to protest the manner in which the Protectorate was being run, and specifically Frank's constant overreach. For Neurath, Frank only frustrated Germany's goal and desire for the Protectorate—that it would become a place of effective Czech-German relations allowing for

⁹⁵ Kennan, "New Government of the Protectorate," May 4, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 146.

⁹⁶ Kennan, "The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia," May 23, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 172.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

organic Germanization to take place. Though in sympathy with Neurath, Kennan was doubtful that the visit would lead to any positive change: “It will be easy...for Herr Frank to convince [Hitler] that Baron von Neurath’s views are only the products of an old-fashioned liberalism as little in keeping with the principles of National Socialism as with the stern necessities of the moment.”⁹⁸

As Frank’s methods of terror became more commonplace in the Protectorate, Kennan began hearing whispers from Czech officials and National Community leaders about when the benefits of long-view cooperation with the Germans would be no longer worth the price. Their greatest fear was that, by working with the Germans in an effort to keep national unity, they would lose the good graces of the Czech populace, who, in bearing the brunt of Nazi terror, was looking on the Protectorate government’s complicity less and less favorably.⁹⁹ Kennan learned from his contacts that many Czech officials wanted to become “wholehearted protagonists” and martyrs in the name of Czech separatism. What kept them from crossing this line and breaking away from cooperation was the hope that Britain and the United States would soon take a harder stance against Hitler. If such were to happen, Czech officials felt that their chances of successfully opposing Nazi occupation would increase dramatically.¹⁰⁰

Benes, who at the time of the occupation was still lecturing at the University of Chicago, had only bitter words for Hacha and Chvalkovsky, who in his mind had, through a spirit of “narrow-mindedness and ignorance,” sacrificed the Czechoslovak state without authorization.¹⁰¹ In light of the consternation he felt toward those who oversaw Czechoslovakia’s erasure, Benes

⁹⁸ Kennan, “The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia,” June 6, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 179-180.

⁹⁹ Kennan, “The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia,” May 23, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 176.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰¹ Benes, *Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 59.

wholeheartedly approved of Hurban's refusal to turn over the Washington legation to the Germans. For those envoys and ministers who did succumb to pressure and hand the keys to Reich officials, Benes offered no excuse and stated his belief that once the war passed, those diplomats would need be held accountable for their lack of backbone.¹⁰² From both Prague and Washington, it was difficult for Americans to pinpoint who exactly represented the Czechoslovaks in 'U.S.-Czechoslovak relations.' However, in late-March, Hurban visited Moffat with a bright smile on his face, happy to share that he had received some funds from Prague, which he took to mean that the Protectorate, in its "heart of hearts," approved of the stand he was taking against the Germans in Washington.¹⁰³ Just as the Czechs inside the Protectorate worried over the possibility of war not coming for years, Benes harbored similar concerns in Chicago. Not only did he fear German consolidation in the Protectorate, but he also feared that over time Czech opposition might falter or give in: "would they remain strong in their resistance and morally untouched?"¹⁰⁴

The desire of Czech officials to turn from compromisers into martyrs grew as the efforts of Frank's contingent intensified. Kennan offered the department a few notable examples. In one, he described a speech Frank delivered in the town of Budweis of southern Bohemia. The town, which possessed a clear Czech majority, played host to some 40,000 Nazi officials, and it received a rude awakening when Frank proclaimed that Budweis would soon become a German town again.¹⁰⁵ In another example, Kennan recounted the story of a Czech high school class,

¹⁰² Ibid., 59. Benes did express understanding that in countries under direct pressure from Germany, Czechoslovak ministers had little choice but to pass their legations to the Germans. Benes took issue with those who had an opportunity to take a stand and chose otherwise.

¹⁰³ Moffat, diplomatic journal, March 27, 1939, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Benes, *Memoirs of Eduard Benes*, 64.

¹⁰⁵ Kennan, "The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia," June 6, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 181. Budweis had a long of history of having an ambiguous identity during the Habsburg Empire. See Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

which while on a field trip saw one of its students shot in the arm and the rest detained in prison for mildly rebellious behavior. It was another case in which German officials could do little to restrain the more volatile behavior of local Sudeten administrators. Naturally, said Kennan, Czech officials were indignant, and were only waiting for Chamberlain's ouster and to see some backbone in the Western powers before ending their compromising approach to the German occupation.¹⁰⁶

Kennan deplored the fanatical hostility exemplified by many Sudeten and Austrian Nazis, or those Germans who had fully bought into the extremist excess. He despised it most of all because of how it prevented any purposeful or positive coexistence between Czechs and Germans, something which Kennan genuinely believed the region needed. Kennan did not just want German and Czech states to live well side-by-side, but he felt that the two peoples needed to live under the same banner—that reemergence of a strong Central European state. The arrogance and fanaticism demonstrated by so many Nazis toward the Czechs, and the resulting Czech hostility, rendered such a notion impossible.¹⁰⁷

By July, the Protectorate system of Czech governance existed in name only. Neurath's office had progressed to the point of possessing "dictatorial powers," which unfortunately trickled down to local Nazi authorities, too.¹⁰⁸ In terms of practical governance, German

¹⁰⁶ Kennan, "The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia," June 6, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 182-183.

¹⁰⁷ Kennan, "The Situation in the Protectorate," July 17, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 210-211. Kennan spent ample time describing a speech given by Rudolf Jung, a Nazi leader who had been imprisoned by Czech authorities for several months during the Sudeten crises of the 1930s. In the speech, Jung gloated over the fall of the Czech state and spoke repeatedly of Czech senselessness. When reporting the speech, German papers called it "conciliatory." To Kennan, then, many of the Nazis exercising authority in the Protectorate were delusional, convincing themselves that their tactics and attitudes resembled patience and generosity when they in fact threatened the very existence of Czech identity and independence. As a result, said Kennan, "they are simply going different roads, and nothing serious is being done to bring them together."

¹⁰⁸ Kennan, "General Conditions in Bohemia and Moravia," July 3, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 188.

authorities stopped bothering to put up a charade of deference, and they began passing laws, such as appropriating a half billion dollars worth of Jewish property, without so much as informing relevant Czech officials. Members of the National Community and Protectorate government considered resigning over the issue but decided to wait for a more favorable “political constellation.”¹⁰⁹ Kennan was doubtful that it would actually happen: “being Czechs, they have a remarkable capacity of delay, and in all probability they will keep putting things off until they find themselves thrown out by the Germans.” Hacha himself was known to have wanted to resign, or even commit suicide, but he continued on in his post, feeling that it might still be of some good to the Czech people. Kennan had sympathy for Hacha, recognizing that he had “borne much of the tragedy of his people” for six months.

Despite the proliferation of German excess, Kennan still saw value in the Protectorate government and National Community:

They are still the symbol of Czech nationhood. They are the only remaining link between the past and the present political systems. They are the only group which could pretend to speak for the nation as a whole and which is permitted—however futilely—to do so. As long as they remain, the Czechs feel that they have some sort of open national leadership and are recognized as a nation rather than a mere minority or—as one Czech put it—a picturesque costume group.¹¹⁰

By mid-summer, Kennan retained little hope for German-Czech coexistence as bad feelings spiraled out of control. Incidents in the towns of Kladno and Nachod resulted in German authorities levying more punitive measures on the Czech populace.¹¹¹ “Repression breeds

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 191.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 190-191.

¹¹¹ In the Kladno incident, a German police officer was killed, presumably at the hands of a Czech citizen. The Germans responded by imposing martial law, making thousands of arrests, and dismissing the mayor (who was later found dead, supposedly from suicide, though Kennan surmised that foul play was afoot). At Nachod, a Czech policeman was killed by a German, but Reich officials offered only a muted response. The Czechs were especially upset in light of the fact that the Germans had lost no time in turning the mysterious death of the German officer into an example of Czech terrorism. Both stories made front page news in the United States. A.R. Parker, “Nazi Rift Reported over Czech Policy,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1939, 8 and “German Policeman Slain Near Prague; Nazis Punish Area,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1939, 1.

bitterness, and bitterness breeds more repression. In this way, a vicious circle is created from which, at the moment, there seems to be no escape,” wrote Kennan.¹¹² For things to get better, argued Kennan, both sides would need to show good will. No signs pointed toward that happening. Rather, as the Nazi approach to occupation turned sour, Kennan anticipated that the Reich would soon attempt to crush by sheer force Czech nationalism. If this were to happen, argued Kennan, the Germans would probably have the upper hand at first, but if the tide were to ever turn, “Czech retaliation will be fearful to contemplate.”¹¹³

If Slovakia initially hoped to command respect from nearby governments and observers with its newfound autonomy, it did not take long for this goal to be thoroughly disappointed. Kennan, for one, never placed stock in the Slovakian experiment. Though it had received guaranteed protection from Germany, Berlin was perfectly content to pursue its ‘big brother’ role flakily. Throughout March, when Hungary and Slovakia pitted their weak, hodgepodge soldiers against one another in the name of border delimitation, Hitler kept tabs passively, happy to make use of his “divide and rule” policy.¹¹⁴ Eventually, the Hungarians pushed some twenty miles past Ruthenia’s border, causing the Slovaks to seek diplomatic help from Vienna and Berlin. To their chagrin, Reich officials had little interest in the Slovak-Ruthene border and advised the Slovaks to take up the matter in Budapest. The Slovaks did just that, but without German support, they were forced to accept Hungary’s terms.¹¹⁵ In interpreting the geopolitical drama, Kennan saw a

¹¹² Kennan, “General Conditions in Bohemia and Moravia,” July 3, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 194.

¹¹³ Kennan, “The Situation in Bohemia and Moravia,” May 23, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 178.

¹¹⁴ Kennan, personal letter, March 30, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 104. In regard to Slovakia’s ‘hodgepodge’ band of soldiers, see Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Storm-Troopers in Slovakia: The Rodobrana and the Hlinka Guard,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 3 (1971): 97-119.

¹¹⁵ Kennan, “Slovak-Hungarian Border,” April 3, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 106-107. In his report, Kennan delves deeply into the history of the Ruthene-Hungarian-Slovak border dispute, concluding that once Czechoslovakia split apart, Slovak and Ruthene officials, incompetent in matters of constitutional revision, had no hope of securing border delimitation in their favor.

self-delusional Slovakia, a temporarily victorious Hungary, and a Germany focused on bigger issues.

While Kennan discovered the unsavory developments taking place in Slovakia firsthand, the department in Washington, aided by Kennan's reports, gave Bratislava cold-shoulder treatment. The department had received a communique from Slovakia on April 8 in which the Slovak foreign minister requested that Washington recognize the province's independence.¹¹⁶ The department did not reply. When talking to the Argentine ambassador, whose government was unsure of how to handle its own Slovak communique, Moffat explained that, as far as the department was concerned, Slovakia was nothing but a "puppet government under the orders of Berlin."¹¹⁷ Naturally, then, the department felt it right to revoke its most-favored-nation trade agreement with Slovakia, as it had done for Bohemia and Moravia, and it had no intention of recognizing the province's attempt to be its own master. This was a serious blow to Slovakia, which, already wallowing in its "utter penury," struggled to salvage international trade during the spring and summer. In addition to their communiqués to specific governments, Bratislava announced after the occupation that all Czechoslovak trade treaties would remain in force for Slovakia until new treaties were worked out. Kennan's remark that the attempt by Bratislava to continue its foreign trade contracts had "not proved very successful" was an understatement. Sensing the territory's "disorganization and lack of confidence," no foreign government wanted to attach itself to the Slovakian experiment. The only country to make a commercial deal with Slovakia was Poland, but as Kennan pointed out, since both countries were agricultural, they had very little to offer one another.

¹¹⁶ Slovakia's foreign minister was Dr. F. Durcansky.

¹¹⁷ Moffat, diplomatic journal, April 18, 1939, 1-2.

As the government in the Protectorate took shape throughout the spring, so too did Slovakia's, and Kennan concluded that only one main point differentiated the two: while the Reichsprotektor had offices in Bohemia and Moravia, none existed in Slovakia. That, as well as the fact that Slovakia's independence had been recognized by Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Italy, may have seemed promising for Bratislava, but Kennan found such facts misleading. The true nature of Slovakia's position was little better than the Czech lands, and the "servitudes" which Bratislava had accepted in its submission to Berlin were just as far-reaching as those imposed on Bohemia and Moravia.¹¹⁸ The Slovaks, though, were simply unable or unwilling to recognize such to be the case.

Among the many problems facing the Slovaks, Kennan was keenly interested in their currency and financial difficulties. Before Czechoslovakia's dissolution, Bratislava faced a deficit of roughly 300,000,000, to which Kennan estimated that another 200,000,000 should be added to account for new expenses. Some stopgap measures, such as the minting of new coinage—its factory was conveniently located in Slovakia—helped a little, but Slovakia's fiscal intelligentsia left one wanting. Word of their efforts and mishaps found its way to Prague's business circles, bringing "considerable amusement" to Czech bankers and financiers.¹¹⁹ As Kennan documented parallel circumstances in Bohemia-Moravia and Slovakia, there was no shortage of examples from which he concluded that on one hand, there was the capable realism of the Czechs, and on the other, the unaware fantasies of the Slovaks.

Toward the end of April, Kennan conceded that things had quieted down in Slovakia, but that it was a long way away from actual stability. The peace and quiet Kennan attributed to both

¹¹⁸ Kennan, "The Constitutional and Judicial Situation," April 14, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 120.

¹¹⁹ Kennan, "The Problem of Slovak Currency," April 17, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 122-124.

the German military occupation and German influence in the Slovak government, which though less direct than its influence in the Protectorate, was just as effective. All the major issues confronting Slovakia—the deficit, trade, land redistribution—were settled by German-Slovak commissions in which the Slovaks attended as “experts” rather than “partners,” and Germany exercised the right to make all final decisions.¹²⁰ Since the new Slovak government was already inclined to mimic National Socialism, the Reich felt comfortable in allowing Bratislava to “struggle along” in smaller, internal matters. Foremost of which were matters of legislation against the Jews. Though the average Slovak held its new government in low-esteem, one characteristic which brought the province together was a “rousing” anti-Semitism, and it was not long before the population demanded of its government a Slovak Nuremberg Law.¹²¹ Without the influence of the Czechs, who Kennan argued had always prevented harsh anti-Semitic legislation from being passed, Kennan he that sooner or later Slovakia would model Germany’s approach. For the time being, though, the Catholic Church and barrenness of the Slovak economy infused a touch of caution in Bratislava’s anti-Jew policy.

When the Slovaks did finally publish their law on limiting the rights of Jews in the spring, it was very much a mixed bag, being in some ways harsher than the Nuremberg Laws, but in other ways more lenient. Kennan and Linnell attributed this to the fact that there were so many competing voices with stake in the formation of Slovakia’s anti-Jew policy, namely the legislators, the Catholic church, and the far-right Hlinka People’s Party.¹²² For all the conflicting viewpoints, though, the new law did bear striking clarity: “In Slovakia,” reported Kennan, “a

¹²⁰ Kennan, “Conditions in Slovakia,” April 18, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 125.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 126-127. On the Slovak populace’s view its government, Kennan wrote that [T]he government leaders, who would scarcely command the support of a majority of the population in a free election, seem to feel the need of something which would bolster the system they have established.”

¹²² Kennan, “Law Limiting the Jews in Slovakia,” May 10, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 149.

person is either a Jew or he is not.”¹²³ Unlike the laws developed in Nazi Germany, there were to be no ambiguous cases, no mixed persons, but simply 100% Jew or 100% not. Furthermore, the day-to-day treatment of Jews was generally left to local authorities, and Kennan was quite confident that these “irresponsible elements” of the population would make life for Jews plenty difficult.¹²⁴

At times, Kennan argued that the Slovaks did show some real courage in bucking German expectations for its own self-interest. He noted how the Slovak government awarded almost all available jobs to Slovaks, willfully passing over the German and Hungarian minorities. They even went as far as to demand that German minority leaders submit to Slovak party authorities. Kennan seemed to express admiration laced with the pity of one who knows better, saying that the situation was “indicative of the extent to which the Slovaks have been encouraged to think they are going to be permitted to run their own show.”¹²⁵ For Kennan, then, even Slovak courage was rooted in things less admirable: unawareness and self-delusion. This would lead to unpredictable behavior on Slovakia’s part, which could potentially cause trouble for Germany, something they had little patience for. In a biting twist of irony, Berlin harkened back to its rhetoric of 1938 when it accused the Slovakia of treating its German minority in an “intolerable” manner, demanding assurances that such behavior would not continue.¹²⁶

As the spring and summer wore on, Germany’s options for what to do with Central Europe grew in an endless number of directions. The implications for Slovakia, where German decision-making remained “paramount,” were grim. According to Kennan, “well-informed

¹²³ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Kennan, “Conditions in Slovakia,” April 18, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 126-128.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 128. The Germans were always at the ready to use minority issues to their advantage in Central Europe. In May, for instance, the Reich gained control of the German and Slovak minorities in Hungary, to be used primarily as tools to pit Bratislava against Budapest, thus keeping both countries weak and at Berlin’s mercy. Kennan, “Report on Conditions in Slovakia,” May 1, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 137.

opinion” in Bratislava felt that, as long as the status quo remained, Slovakia could count on a continuation of its position vis-à-vis Germany.¹²⁷ Problems would arise, however, if the situation changed in any significant way. Kennan believed that war would immediately result in Berlin’s clamping down on Slovakia, unmasking Bratislava’s charade of autonomy once and for all. Things could be equally bad, though, if Germany worked out its issues with Poland and Hungary. If such were to happen, thought Kennan, Germany would likely partition Slovakia, throwing the bulk of it to Budapest and keeping some strategic scraps for herself. The goal, simply put, was to play Hungary and Slovakia against one another, fanning the flames of their grievances and propaganda machines.¹²⁸

Thus, Slovakia was left with no real friends or partners. Things became worse when Hitler, in listing the concessions that Germany could grant to Poland in relation to the Danzig issue, stated that Berlin would be willing to guarantee Slovakia’s independence through a joint understanding with Budapest and Warsaw. Since Germany had already guaranteed Slovakia’s existence unilaterally, Hitler’s statement wrought confusion and concern in the minds of Slovaks. Kennan, for one, had little confidence in the state’s future, commenting that Slovakia was “ripe for partition,” and that Germany was toying with the region for its own purposes, and therefore policy toward Slovakia changed day by day.¹²⁹

Slovakia, hampered by debt and new expenditures, embarked on expensive public works projects, though they were necessarily financed by Germany and to Berlin’s benefit. When Kennan spent a day in Bratislava in mid-July, the Slovaks he encountered did not possess the undue confidence of those in charge; rather, they admitted that Berlin would continue to fund

¹²⁷ Kennan, “Report on Conditions in Slovakia,” May 1, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 135-136.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-140.

¹²⁹ Kennan, “Conditions in Slovakia,” May 15, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 163.

Slovakia's public works and infrastructure so long as it proved helpful to Hitler's future plans.¹³⁰ Once the benefits dried up, then Berlin would dispose of Slovakia in whatever manner was most convenient, whether it be partition, full annexation, or something else.

Even as late as July Kennan, when visiting Bratislava, could not procure specific details of Slovakia's foreign investments and trade. Though he inquired about them to different officials, the only answers he received were dismissive claims that the numbers had not yet been compiled, or that no corresponding office had yet been established. Kennan had different reasons for this lack of information: "Slovak exports...have been just about negligible."¹³¹ It was not just finances which remained obscure in Slovakia, but entire apparatuses of government. Skirmishes between Hlinka Guards and Germans and Hungarians, as well as confused leadership in Bratislava, prevented the province from achieving stability. One American correspondent informed readers that "Slovakia is lapsing into a condition in which every village and township is a separate republic." Similar to Kennan's reports, the correspondent could not help but reinforce the distinction between Czechs and Slovaks, noting that Slovakia's administrative chaos encouraged "banditry and disorder," the likes of which had "never existed in the Czecho-Slovak Republic."¹³²

While Slovak officials enjoyed what amounted to illusory prestige by attaching themselves to Germans, the Slovak people only grew more resentful to their German overlords. Not only was anti-German sentiment spreading throughout the province, though, but Slovaks also started exhibiting greater friendliness toward the Czechs. A *bon mot* made its way through

¹³⁰ Kennan, "Conditions in Slovakia," July 12, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 201. For example, the Germans helped fund the construction of a new highway system in Slovakia which would allow the Wehrmacht to cut off the Poles and secure the Teschen district in case of war.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³² A.R. Parker, "Czechs and Slovaks Are Now Deeply Stirred," *New York Times*, June 18, 1939, 61.

the region that “it took the Germans to make the Slovaks like the Czechs.”¹³³ Still, little actions here and there to placate Slovak desires, along with the startling complicity of Slovak leaders, led Kennan to conclude that the anti-German opposition in Slovakia posed no immediate danger to Reich authorities.¹³⁴

While Slovak leaders still profess the utmost confidence in the Fuhrer’s guarantee of Slovak independence...no one else in Bratislava seems to feel that the Germans will keep this regime in power one day longer than they consider it to their own advantage to do so...[the Slovak regime] is completely subservient to German wishes and can hold the territory conveniently at Germany’s disposal until it becomes possible to make plans of a more long-term nature.¹³⁵

Kennan’s lack of enthusiasm for Slovak independence reached its crescendo in late-July when the province published its new constitution. The new law of the land relegated the government to being “completely an organ of the Hlinka People’s Party.” Freedom of confession, speech, art, science, and other activities were guaranteed so long as they did not conflict with legislation, public order, or Christian customs. “In other words,” wrote Kennan, “they are not guaranteed at all.” Because Slovakia had essentially become a one-party state, Kennan believed it would soon become a “vortex of the foulest sorts of deceit, sycophancy, and intrigue.”¹³⁶ Like the view he had developed during the Second Republic, Kennan had little confidence in Bratislava’s leading political figures. He saw Tiso (now president) and Tuka (the leading radical voice) and Mach (secretary of interior) as jealous “minor prophets,” none able to offer a coherent political platform for the state. From Kennan’s point-of-view, the Slovaks were

¹³³ Kennan, “Conditions in Slovakia,” July 12, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 205.

¹³⁴ Ibid. For instance, around the time of Kennan’s visit, the Germans placed M. Sidor, the former Slovak Minister of Interior, as the Slovak envoy to the Vatican, thereby pleasing radical and Catholic elements and throwing a wrench in anti-German opposition.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 205-206.

¹³⁶ Kennan, “The New Slovak Constitution,” July 24, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 214.

politically inept and thus easier pray for the Germans.¹³⁷ The entire situation served as an “eloquent testimonial to the decline in respect for individual dignity in Central Europe.”¹³⁸

In regard to the constitution, Kennan made sure to point out that Germany had retained tight control over the province. The German papers in Bratislava, which had become the most authoritative papers in Slovakia, warned after the constitution’s passing that the document would only be a “scrap of paper” if it was not backed up by the “proper spirit.” Kennan doubted whether the Slovaks would understand the importance of those types of statements from the Germans. The seasoned Czechs had learned to “take warnings more seriously than promises,” but the Slovaks, especially Slovak officials, had not yet emerged from the excitement of autonomy. “[They] will...doubtless accustom themselves to it in the course of time,” said Kennan.¹³⁹

As July turned to August, Kennan produced one more report of the conditions in Bohemia and Moravia prior to the outbreak of war in September. According to Kennan, it had been the unhappiest summer for the region since World War I. Between electrical storms and crop failures, there was enough bad news before one even counted the German occupation. The nature of Germany’s occupation appeared inconsistent to Kennan. Frank, “the real leader,” continued to approach his task with “ruthless zeal,” and as a result, the “underworld figures of the Gestapo” continued to terrorize the public.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, though, Kennan noticed a sense of nervousness among the German occupiers and a desire to court Czech favor. To this, the Czech citizenry showed no receptive signs. There was a lethargy, “almost a paralysis,” to

¹³⁷ American correspondents agreed, and the Slovaks as incapable politicians became the prevailing view. One American correspondent wrote, “The Slovaks are not a political people, and the only “ism” in which they are at present interested is “tourism,” which has brought customers to them in the past.” A.R. Parker, “Czechs and Slovaks Are Now Deeply Stirred,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1939, 61.

¹³⁸ Kennan, “The New Slovak Constitution,” July 24, 1939, in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 214.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

¹⁴⁰ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 217-219.

everything the Czechs did. Utterly fed up with the Germans, the Czechs put up a wall of apathy and disdain. The Germans searched for pockets of the populace where Germanization might take root, but fertile ground for increasing the pro-Nazi camp among Czechs was hard to come by. “In this respect the Czechs may be said to have won a skirmish,” wrote Kennan.¹⁴¹

The National Community remained passive, cautious, pathetic, but not completely devoid of purpose. Czech officials felt they had succeeded in maintaining the nation’s identity, and they had even reached an understanding with Benes and the Czech emigres. The Germans, upset with the National Community’s passive and lethargic approach, assumed more dictatorial powers in the Protectorate, hastening anti-Semitic measures and inciting Bohemia and Moravia’s fascist fringes. Still, the majority of the people remained detached: “Everything is in suspense. No one takes initiative; no one plans for the future. Cultural life and amusements continue in half-hearted, mechanical spirit...People prefer to sit through evenings in beer gardens...to wait with involuntary patience for the approach of something which none of them could quite describe but which they are all convinced must come and must affect all their lives profoundly.”¹⁴²

The profound change the Czechs sensed they were waiting for came on September 1. Hitler’s armies blitzed into Poland, and world war had come. As a result of the war, the department moved Kennan to Berlin to support America’s overwhelmed legation there. Germany clamped down on the Protectorate completely, and Czech officials and citizens hunkered down for the difficulties of wartime occupation. Overall, the time between the occupation and the war proved transformative in U.S.-Czech and U.S.-Slovak relations. During those five months, Bohemia-Moravia and Slovakia inevitably went their separate ways, and as a result, the United States began to more definitively distinguish between the two regions. While retaining sympathy

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 219-220.

¹⁴² Ibid., 221-224.

and support—where possible—for the Czechs, Slovakia became nothing but a puppet of Nazi Germany in the eyes of department officials. Thus, even though Washington still regarded Prague on good terms, the concept of Czechoslovakia—a unified Czech and Slovak state—faded from American points-of-view.

Lastly, Kennan's documentation, though not widely read by the department at the time, would prove significant going forward. After the war, Kennan would become a prominent voice in American foreign policy, and his experiences and analyses from summer 1939 would color his interpretations of the postwar world, including the merit of a resurgent Czechoslovakia. At the time, though, Kennan's reports, if nothing else, served as a final prewar representation of the impotence underlying U.S.-Czech relations. For five months after Germany's occupation of the Czech lands, Kennan watched and recorded the varying miseries the Czech people faced, and the varying delusions the Slovak leaders accepted, at the hands of the German menace. Washington, unable to intervene, dispatched Kennan for purely reportorial reasons—to observe, to gain information, and to study Berlin's tactics. In October 1938, Germany butchered Czechoslovakia. In March 1939, Germany butchered Czecho-Slovakia. Finally, during the spring and summer of 1939, Germany butchered Bohemia-Moravia and played with Slovakia, and Kennan, America's representative, could only watch it all happen.

Conclusion

Here is the building we lived in, and the cool, vaulted passageway to the courtyard with the baroque fountain...Up those stairs, two flights of stairs, was our door...I am no longer the same person who used to go up and down these stairs. The ghost of that person is somewhere up there still...It was only two years ago; but it was another time, another life. And now, we are all a little lonely. So much has died...¹

Such were Kennan's thoughts during a return visit to Prague in late-1940. His poetic wordsmithing notwithstanding, the heart of his reflection is clear: the war heaved profound change on not only the region, nor the continent, but the entire world. It was thus a peculiar, almost mystical, experience for Kennan to once again find himself pacing in the Schonborn's garden and ascending the staircase to the familiar rooms and salons. The efforts of that time, two years earlier, the reporting, the telegraphing, the travelling, were now buried underneath the rubble of Hitler's invading armies. Buried with those efforts were the traits that had defined U.S.-Czechoslovak diplomacy before the war, irreparably weakened in the year leading up to it. From the old palace, Kennan understood quite well just how impotent the sympathetic wire running from Washington to Prague had proven:

[The Czechs] are aware of the sympathy of the West; but they will always appraise this sympathy at precisely the value which it had for them on the day of Munich...they must not be encumbered with too much advice and solicitude from the West. The heroics of irredentism are all very well from a distance. But the problems of these Czechs who must today take responsibility for their people before the Germans are already too burdensome, too pressing, and too delicate to permit them to assume additional strain. Their tasks leave no room for the glories of martyrdom; and those who wish their people well will think twice before embarrassing them with their censure of their sympathy.²

When Kennan revisited the memoires stored inside the Schonborn, the war was over a year old. Germany was dominating on all fronts. In the former Czechoslovakia, Czech Jews were

¹ George Kennan, *Sketches from a Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 52-53.

² Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 240.

being sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and Slovak Jews were experiencing persecution at the hands of their own leaders.³ Ruthenia had not existed for eighteen months. The Czech government-in-exile was struggling to garner recognition and concessions from the Western powers, and the Czech resistance in Bohemia and Moravia was scoring few victories against their German occupiers, whose harshness, Kennan thought, was only matched by their stupidity.⁴ The future looked grim, and the past belonged to ghosts.

The Second World War and its aftermath signaled a new epoch for U.S.-Czechoslovak relations. Of course, the Allies eventually defeated the Axis powers, and a new world order emerged. In addition to a resurgent, reunited Czechoslovakia, the United States and the Soviet Union came out of the war as the world's two superpowers. It was a new conflict in its nascence, and one that would set the course not only for U.S.-Czechoslovak relations, but Czechoslovakia's future altogether.

Eduard Benes returned to the presidency after the war, and he once again found himself in a difficult position. Prague, perennially at the center of things, was caught between the two superpowers—Washington and Moscow—and each expected Benes' allegiance at the expense of the other. Similar to the conundrum faced by the Second Republic, Benes, backed into a corner, promised liberalism to the United States and loyalty to the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the zero-sum atmosphere of the early Cold War did not allow Prague to play both camps for long.

³ For a comprehensive account of Theresienstadt, the camp to which most Czech Jews were sent, and one of the most peculiar Nazi war camps, see FROM PRAGUE AFTER MUNICH.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945: The Face of a Coerced Community*, trans. Belinda Cooper (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 1955.

⁴ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 240. During his return visit to Prague, Kennan was unsure of what type of occupation would win the day in Bohemia and Moravia: "The moderates, still headed by Neurath, would like to give them something in the nature of a real autonomy and make a serious attempt to reconcile [the Czechs] to German rule by concessions. The radicals, still headed by Frank, would like to smash them completely as a nation, destroy their intelligentsia, and make Bohemia and Moravia into German provinces. Supremacy between these two groups can be decided only on the mat of Nazi party politics. Prague pundits say that the first round in the battle was won by Frank, that the second was a draw, and that the third is about to be fought out."

The State Department considered a pro-West Czechoslovakia crucial to American success in any postwar conflict with the USSR. In April and May 1945, when both American and Soviet forces were in position to liberate Prague, the department urged Washington to act decisively, citing the inherent friendliness and historical connections between the United States and Czechoslovakia, further noting the “traditional sympathy that the Americans felt for the democratic country in the heart of Europe.”⁵ Around the same time, the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA, called Czechoslovakia the “master key to Europe.”⁶ Ultimately, however, Harry Truman, who assumed the presidency upon Roosevelt’s passing in April, along with General Dwight Eisenhower, allowed the Red Army to liberate the capital city.⁷ In conjunction with liberation, Moscow also orchestrated the reestablishment of Benes’ government in Prague, and U.S. officials were kept in the dark. It was at this time that Kennan, then serving as a chargé in Moscow, and who probably understood the complexities of Czechoslovakia’s situation better than any American, considered Czechoslovakia lost to the West.

In the years that followed, Czechoslovakia struggled to balance its East-West schizophrenia, and internal political matters caused it to gravitate toward Moscow.⁸ Its proximity

⁵ The State Department expressed this view often throughout the early Cold War. For an example, see Igor Lukes, *On the Edge of Cold War: American Diplomats and Spies in Postwar Prague* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45. In part, the department argued that Czechoslovakia “is an excellent ground to test the promise of the Soviet Government of tripartite cooperation as it is the only one of the capitals of Eastern and Central Europe which has not yet been occupied by the Soviet Army... The success or failure of cooperation in Prague will have a profound effect on our entire position in Central Europe which would be immeasurably strengthened by our occupation of Prague. The Department of State firmly believes that the interests of the United States will best be served by the immediate occupation of Prague.”

⁶ “Report on Czechoslovakia: Pivot Point of Europe,” July 4, 1945, NARA, Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, as quoted in Lukes, *On the Edge of Cold War*, 11.

⁷ There were many reasons for this decision. For starters, at the Yalta Conference, February 1945, Roosevelt conceded Moscow’s predominance in Eastern Europe. Eisenhower, coming from a military perspective, did not want to upset the Soviet Union, which in 1945 was still technically an ally to the United States, by questionably getting in the way of its liberation march. Truman, new to the presidency, did not want to override his top generals’ opinions on the matter.

⁸ See Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy Towards Eastern Europe, 1943-1947: Universalism in an Area of Essential Interest to the United States* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978), 149-182.

to the USSR necessitated that it rely on Moscow for security. Czechoslovakia's new coalition government included a wide-array of parties, including a strong communist presence. Consequently, Prague transformed its economic and political framework with broad socialist policy. A major issue of contention emerged between Washington and Prague over the issue of Czechoslovakia's German minority. Sending the Germans packing was one point that nearly all Czechs and Slovaks agreed upon, but the United States, in the midst of rebuilding its relations with Germany and wanting to uphold humanitarian values, remained cool toward the idea of an immediate, wholesale expulsion. Moscow, on the other hand, got on board.⁹

The Marshall Plan proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. By mid-1947, the Truman Administration and State Department increasingly saw things through an East-West prism, and they remained laser-focused on securing U.S. influence in the West, particularly in West Germany. Though the United States made U.S. aid available to all of Europe, U.S. officials, Kennan among them, expected, and even hoped, that Moscow would reject the Marshall Plan and force its geopolitical sphere—including Czechoslovakia—to reject American aid, too.¹⁰ That is exactly what happened, and soon after, in February 1948, the Czech Communist Party staged a successful coup in Prague, and Czechoslovakia became a communist state in Stalin's image. It remained one of Moscow's most faithful satellite throughout the

⁹ Laurence Steinhardt to James Byrnes, *FRUS*, 1946, The British Commonwealth, Western and Central Europe, Volume V, 125.

¹⁰ During summer 1947, when Europe debated the Marshall Plan, Czechoslovakia remained half-in and half-out of the Soviet sphere of influence. Initially, Prague expressed hopes that it would participate in the aid program, but Stalin eventually forced it to fall in line. The United States, though not surprised, took this as confirmation that the world had crystalized into two camps, and that Czechoslovakia was now a part of the enemy's camp. This forced-dichotomy was especially painful for Czechoslovakia. In the aftermath of the war, exile governments in places like Poland and Hungary opposed Soviet domination. In response, Stalin crushed them, having communist, pro-Soviet governments installed and recognized. Czechoslovakia was a different story. Its leaders never sought to oppose the USSR, but rather appease it, and to do so with the West, too. Czechoslovakia did not want to choose, but, through the Marshall Plan, both Washington and Moscow essentially required it to do just that.

duration of the Cold War.¹¹ Thus, the consequences of the postwar disconnect between Washington and Prague were serious, generally speaking, but for U.S.-Czech relations, they were detrimental. From 1945 until 1989, when Czechoslovakia broke from the USSR, Prague's status as a Soviet-satellite—something which Washington could not look past—swallowed whole any notion of 'shared bonds' or 'special connections.'

During the three years between World War II and Prague's 1948 coup, U.S. officials, both in Washington and in Prague, tried to win the Czechoslovaks over to the West. Their efforts, however, were inconsistent and ultimately marked by failure. Walter Ullmann, a historian of central and eastern Europe, chronicled these failures.¹² Ullmann's portrait, though understanding of the difficult position U.S. officials were in, stresses how their reporting was often inaccurate and their strategies ineffective. The consequences were, of course, the February 1948 coup d'état, which discarded Prague's lingering crumbs of democracy.¹³

Ullmann's conclusions received hearty and reputable support from Igor Lukes—an eminent Czech-American scholar.¹⁴ Making use of Czech and Soviet materials that had not been available to Ullmann, Lukes paints a similar, albeit more complete, picture of the Czechoslovakia and America's inability to resurrect the special bond—both real and perceived—that coated U.S.-Czech relations in the 1920s and 1930s. However, it was not for a lack of understanding, argues Lukes, that U.S.-Czech relations teetered. In fact, officials in the State Department recognized with great resolution that Prague and Washington's historical friendship,

¹¹ Carole Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Columbus, OH: Westview Press, 2014), 139. Fink writes, "Testifying to Czechoslovakia's reliability, no Soviet troops were stationed on its soil, despite the fact that it bordered on two noncommunist countries, produced the bloc's most advanced armaments, possessed considerable quantities of uranium, and was a prospective site for Soviet nuclear weapons."

¹² Walter Ullmann, *The United States in Prague 1945-1948* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1978).

¹³ Ullmann is careful to note, however, that the majority of blame for Czechoslovakia's fall to communism must be placed on the Czechoslovaks themselves.

¹⁴ Lukes, *On the Edge of Cold War*.

this special bond, primed the pump for continuing a sincere and strategic relationship in the postwar world. Despite this knowledge, American efforts to rekindle or exploit the U.S.-Czech connection failed.

It is difficult to call the culminating failure of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations in 1948 the direct legacy of the two countries' prewar relationship, particularly their strained, impotent relationship of 1938-1939. So much happened during the war that fundamentally altered world diplomacy to its core. It can be said, though, that Washington's inability to build constructive relations with Prague after the war mirrors what happened after Munich and the March occupation. However, most studies of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations stop at Munich, it would be tempting to conclude from such an approach that U.S.-Czechoslovak relations were fine and happy until the war—which altered the paradigm completely—and that it was not until the postwar period that external forces, in this case the Soviet Union, rendered U.S.-Czechoslovak diplomacy ineffectual.

The nature of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations in 1938-1939 dispels this line of thinking. During the eleven months between Munich and World War II, the United States proved incapable of providing meaningful support to Czechoslovakia, crisis after crisis. The sheer complexity of external factors coupled with the neutrality demanded by the American people at home prevented the Roosevelt Administration and State Department, and by extension the Schonborn, from intervening on Prague's behalf. This remained true, on the whole, even after Hitler's march into Bohemia and the subsequent shedding of legal pretense. September 1938 to September 1939 proved time and again America's inability to overcome external forces, such as central Europe's dense jealousies, particularly those of Poland and Hungary, and Hitler's

aggressive foreign policy, in order to stand with Czechoslovakia in potent solidarity.¹⁵ Thus, maybe it should be of no surprise that America was wary of trying to establish influence in central Europe after the war—which was once again a confluence of independent and unstable Polish and Hungarian states—and incapable of overcoming an even greater external force—the Soviet superpower and the establishment of global East-West dichotomy—to rebuild its old, simple, and friendly bond with Czechoslovakia.

A further wrench in prewar U.S.-Czech relations, which likely impacted postwar relations, was the seeming unviability of the reunited Czechoslovak state. During each stage of the year leading up to the war—from “Realization” to “Consolidation” to “Occupation” to “Documentation”—the original Czechoslovak state frayed and fell apart. Before a week had passed after Munich, Slovakia and Ruthenia secured significant autonomy, and by early 1939, each had succumbed to significant German influence. One of the roots of the March occupation was Slovakia’s declared independence (at Germany’s demand), and one of the fruits of the occupation was Ruthenia’s erasure from the map, courtesy of Hungary. Throughout spring and summer 1939, Kennan’s writings from the Czech and Slovak lands hinted at two distinct provinces with distinct peoples and distinct futures. Sympathy, however constrained, was reserved for the Czechs alone.

Interestingly, U.S.-Czechoslovak relations between Munich and the war simultaneously proved both the inherent impotence of the two countries’ bond and the endurance of the two countries’ unique friendship. This first became apparent in the aftermath of Munich. It was a time of realization, and the United States, among other observers, quickly learned how devastating the Munich Agreement was to the Czech, Slovak, and Ruthene lands, and the

¹⁵ Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, 3.

Schonborn soon realized that the Prague government had little hope of avoiding becoming a German vassal. While the United States could do nothing for Prague, it never betrayed her, either, and Prague and Washington remained on officially good terms, even when the State Department had to categorically reject Prague's requests for support.

During the five months following Munich, Prague attempted to consolidate within its rump borders, and the Schonborn served as nothing more than a passive observer. From the Schonborn's point-of-view, Prague was a pitiful site at times, and Carr, Kennan, and the others could only report the unfortunate position of Hacha, Beran, and Chvalkovsky, miserably caught between Hitler and the European democracies. Again, the United States could lend no help, but again, there was a measure of warmth that remained between the two countries, especially evident in America, where Moffat worked with Hurban on issues big and small, and where Benes sought refuge from the trials of 1938.

With March came occupation. Like at Munich, American observers could only watch Germany plunder the Czech lands, but this time Hitler could make no claim of self-determination or minority rights. The ruse was up. Thus, the continued passivity of the United States stands as the most crystallized picture of how ineffectual U.S.-Czechoslovak relations were. America could do nothing to prevent its unjustifiable destruction. Still, the occupation afforded the State Department and Roosevelt Administration the opportunity to unequivocally affirm Czechoslovakia's right to existence, as well as tangible opportunities to extend solidarity.

Finally, during spring and summer 1939, Kennan alone remained to document the German occupation of Bohemia-Moravia and German 'protection' of Slovakia. Kennan's voluminous reportage suggests that in his mind, and thus in many respects the mind of the department, the Czech and Slovak peoples had gone their separate ways. The Prague government

hunkered down under the competing interests of the German occupiers, Neurath and Frank, waiting and hoping for a worldwide conflict to provide an opportunity to restart. Meanwhile, in Bratislava, Slovak leaders deluded themselves into thinking that they were indeed in charge, those from Kennan's vantage point Berlin pulled each and every string. The five-month period of "documentation" serves as an ample indicator of how amorphous and nondescript U.S.-Czechoslovak relations had become since the previous fall, for only one American was there to traverse the Republic's former lands, powerless and waiting, like the Czechs, for Hitler to make his move.

Lastly, as a final thought, it ought to be restated that American policy toward Czechoslovakia, Czecho-Slovakia, the Protectorate, and Slovakia during the time between Munich and the war did not have failure at its core. Diplomacy, at the end of the day, is the vast sum of individuals' efforts, and broadly speaking, U.S. officials dealing with U.S.-Czechoslovak relations in 1938-1939 handled the difficult period well. For starters, in Washington, Hull, Welles, Messersmith, and others at the State Department worked tirelessly to navigate neutrality in the face of European conflict as best they could. It was a mostly thankless situation, and in the words of Moffat, the United States in large part emerged without a knock against it. On a more personal level, Moffat—ever cool, calm, and collected—dealt with Hurban for the entirety of time that passed between Munich and the war, a wonderful example of how friendly relations between countries often occurs at entirely human and seemingly small levels.

Yet it was in Prague that the nitty-gritty details of U.S.-Czechoslovak relations took place. On the whole, the American legation in Prague—the hardworking staff at the Schonborn—performed its responsibilities admirably. Carr, in the very twilight of his career, served as a dedicated minister in a region and city overcome by crises of historical proportions.

Apart from being “caught napping” in March 1939, both the State Department and Schonborn staff had only glowing things to say of Carr.¹⁶ Furthermore, his eleventh-hour plea for the United States to intervene on behalf of the suffering Czechs was, though ineffectual, a good indicator of both his dedication to his post and concern for the people. Carr’s own reports speak to the exquisite staff serving at the Schonborn, as Carr spoke highly of everyone from the secretaries to the interpreters in his telegrams to Hull. The indomitable Kennan produced volumes of reports that constitute nothing short of impressive, and on numerous occasions the State Department officially stamped his work “excellent.”¹⁷

The Schonborn was a uniquely difficult place to serve in 1938 and 1939, as the American diplomats and secretaries there were essentially tasked with passively watching a friendly, likeminded nation be kicked around by international menaces (Germany), shortsighted minor powers (Poland and Hungary), and mutinous provinces (Slovakia and Ruthenia). For eleven months, then, the Schonborn watched, sympathized, and kept its distance. “We all felt small and helpless in the face of what was happening around us,” recalled Kennan. “But,” he continued, “one of the first prerequisites of usefulness in the diplomatic profession is the ability to recognize the limits of one’s possibilities.”¹⁸ And that was just what U.S. officials did—recognize the limits. Unfortunately for Czechoslovakia, that meant acknowledging that the bond between the American and Czechoslovak nations—forged from history and myth, centered on values and democracy—was only as strong as the context of the times. Once the going got rough, then reality set in, and the special bond proved nothing more than futile friendliness and impotent sympathy.

¹⁶ Hull to Carr, April 8, 1939, NARA, RG 84; Kennan, *Memoirs*, 91-92.

¹⁷ Messersmith to Linnell, August 1939, NARA, RG 84, Correspondence File, Prague.

¹⁸ Kennan, *Memoirs*, 90.

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