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country is an understatement. And yet, Poland managed to accomplish extraordinary feats during the twenty-year interwar period, only to once again be devastated during World War II and afterwards abandoned to start from nothing.

Poland's international relations — particularly those with Germany and the Soviet Union — were just as adverse as the domestic situation. The friendly dealings between the Weimar Republic and its World War I enemy Russia were particularly distressing for the Polish Government. First, in 1922, they signed the Treaty of Rapallo reestablishing normal diplomatic relations between the two, canceling any financial debt they owed each other, and enhancing their economic and military bonds. The 1926 Treaty of Berlin solidified the alliance. It was a foretelling of the future Hitler-Stalin partnership that instigated World War II.

Simultaneously, Germany waged the Tariff War (1925-34) against Poland in order to undermine the fledgling Polish economy. This behavior was analogous to the Teutonic debasement of Polish coins in the 16th century — which was halted by Copernicus' revolutionary monetary reform of 1519-26 — and the Prussian sabotaging of the Polish economy during the Partitions of Poland during the second half of the 18th century. While being largely irresponsible to Poland's economic obstructions by her neighbors, the West canceled all of Germany's reparation payments in 1932.

It was obvious that Poland had two horrific enemies as neighbors. Therefore, the most sensible foreign policy was to keep both equally at bay — as was the plan of Marshal Piłsudski. Ostensible success was achieved when the Russians agreed to the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1932.

Concurrently, as a consequence of the Great Depression, the Weimar Republic collapsed and Adolf Hitler rose to power. Just months after the birth of Nazi Germany, Piłsudski secretly proposed a two-front preventive war against Germany to remove Hitler from power. However, France lamentably did not support this measure which could have averted the Second World War.

Meanwhile, Hitler developed an ambitious plan to form an Anti-Comintern Pact against the Soviet Union with aspirations of conquering an enormous area very well-suited for his vision of Lebensraum. Hitler's Germany would not be able to achieve this colossal goal singlehandedly. Therefore, in order to realize this plot, he needed partners; these would be called the Axis Powers during World War II. Japan agreed in 1937 and subsequently assaulted the Soviets from the east. On the western front, Hitler sought Poland's military assistance. To this end, he signed the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact in 1934. Together with the 1932 Pact with the Soviets, it seemed that Poland's peace was assured by both historic enemies. Conscious of the Germany's knavery and capability of exploitation, Poland repeatedly refused to join the Axis Powers.¹⁵ Aware that once German soldiers pass through Poland she will become a German satellite state, the Poles decided to walk a tightrope of peace between both Germany and Russia.

In preparation for war, Germany invaded the demilitarized, mineral-rich Rhineland in 1936 with virtually no objection from the West. This Western response — or rather lack thereof — was the beginning of the injudicious strategy of appeasement. In 1938, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain endorsed the infamous Munich Agreements stating: "We should seek by all means in our power to avoid war [...] by discussion in a spirit of collaboration and good will."¹⁶ The consequence of the

Munich Conference was Hitler's unobstructed incorporation of the Sudetenland into Germany and later subjugation of the entire Czechoslovakia.

Offended by Poland's refusal to join the Anti-Comintern Pact and assured by the West's military idleness, Hitler subsequently insisted that the Free City of Gdańsk be annexed by the Third Reich and German-controlled extraterritorial highways be allowed to be constructed across the Polish Corridor. Too often the outrageous anti-Polish accusation that if Poland had yielded to Hitler's demands World War II would have been averted is raised. Yet, with the case of the Sudetenland-Czechoslovakia as an ominous example, the Poles were aware that this would be only the first step in the complete occupation of their homeland. It had become obvious to them that unless the Germans' unlawful voracious behavior is impeded, Nazi Germany would continue to interminably harass other countries to surrender to their grand plan of domination. Therefore, Józef Beck on behalf of the Polish nation gallantly proclaimed on May 5, 1939: "Peace is a precious and a desirable thing. Our generation, bloodied in wars, certainly deserves peace. But peace, like almost all things of this world, has its price, a high but a measurable one. We in Poland do not know the concept of peace at any price."¹⁷ Thus Beck — and not Winston Churchill as many erroneously believe — was the first to stand up to Hitler and tell him Poland will fight for what is just; Poland was the first nation to rise up against Nazi Germany and not yield to the imprudent policy of appeasement.

Only a week before the German invasion of Poland and after much reluctance, Great Britain was finally convinced to sign the Anglo-Polish Treaty, which clearly stated that if either of the two countries were to be attacked, the other would come to its assistance. Together with the earlier Polish-French alliance, this Treaty formed the Allies of World War II, which were Poland, France, and Great Britain. Nevertheless, much division existed among the members of Parliament on this critical issue. Some British politicians — such as Horace John Wilson — were much more in favor of an Anglo-German pact of cooperation. Observing this deplorable state of affairs, parliamentarian Hugh Dalton lamentably wrote on the eve of the War that the British were about to "sell the Poles down the river, as they sold the Czechs last year."¹⁸

Meanwhile, with Hitler's ambitious plan of eastern conquest derailed by Poland, two days before the Polish-British Pact, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union — states with two diametrically-opposed ideologies — signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Hence, Hitler abandoned Japan to fight unaided in the east against the Soviet Union. This notorious Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact divided Poland in half — initiating the Fourth

Partition of Poland, which reversed the official borders from those legally recognized after the Versailles Conference to those belligerently established in the previous century. Just as 150 years earlier, no country would come to Poland's assistance; and likewise, all of Europe would consequently have to suffer the terrors of another World War.

Taking advantage of Britain's half-hearted declaration of alliance with Poland, Nazi Germany invaded Poland with a great majority of her armed forces — leaving its western border virtually unprotected. Had the Allies of Poland actually mobilized a western front instead of just verbally declaring war on September 3, 1939, World War II would have lasted a couple of weeks and not have been a world war at all. Once again, the West failed to seize the opportunity to remove Hitler from power.

On the other hand, Stalin kept his promise to Hitler. The day after fighting between the Soviets and Japanese ceased¹⁹ — on September 17 — the Red Army invaded Poland from the east. Two of history's worst mass murderers carved up Poland while the West simply watched.

Nazi Germany broadcasted and publicized propaganda worldwide against Poland to indict her as the belligerent — yet militarily backward — country that incited the War. The Nazis had two main purposes for these lies: firstly, to try to convince the West that Poland was the real culprit and secondly, to exaggerate the strength and efficiency of the Nazi German war machine — a clever attempt at psychological warfare, so that others would think twice before engaging German forces. One of the fallacies that the Germans spread was that the Poles attacked a radio station at Gleiwitz near the German-Polish border on August 31, 1939; consequently, in response to this claimed Polish act of aggression, Germany was compelled to wage a defensive war against Poland. This falsehood as well as twenty others — codenamed Operation Himmler — was an attempt to provide a justification for Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland.

Although the truth about the staged Gleiwitz provocation was uncovered after a couple of days, the Nazis were successful in spreading lies about Poland's alleged military backwardness. Some of these myths are that Polish cavalry charged German tanks, the Polish Air Force was destroyed on the ground, and Poland surrendered very quickly because she was unable to withstand the power of the German blitzkrieg. All of these are part of the German-orchestrated propaganda.

These myths persist in textbooks as well as in public knowledge to this day because the Western Allies in attempting to cover up their scandalous behavior at the start of the war sought to create the illusion that Poland was overrun in a matter of hours or few days and thus the

West was unable to do anything more than issue a declaration of war against Germany.

On the contrary, the September Campaign lasted just as long as the Battle of France in 1940 although the British and French had an additional half-year to prepare for the war and were not assaulted from two sides as was Poland. Furthermore, unlike France, Poland never surrendered to Nazi Germany but fought from the first day to the last as an Allied Nation. Moreover, the Polish Army destroyed 30 percent of the German Army's tanks and armored cars and 25 percent of the Luftwaffe's airplanes.²⁰ Such losses would have been impossible had Polish cavalry charged German tanks and had the Polish Air Force been wiped out while still on the ground. Also, the Germans needed to use twice as much ammunition, artillery shells, and bombs in Poland than during the conquest of France the following year.²¹ In short, Nazi Germany suffered greater losses in 1939 against Poland alone than against the united Allies in 1940. Such losses in Poland postponed Hitler's assault on France by seven months while the Polish Army escaped and regrouped to fight in France, Syria, and Norway in May 1940. Therefore, "if Hitler and Stalin had intended to destroy Poland completely, they hardly succeeded."²²

However, the Partition of Poland along the Ribbentrop-Molotov Line was ultimately a success with a lasting legacy visible today. In the beginning of the War, the West would not recognize the German-Russian division of Poland. British Prime Minister Churchill eloquently condemned it as "an act of aggression in shameful collusion with Hitler"²³ against Poland and in 1941, along with U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, issued the Atlantic Charter — which conspicuously affirmed the sovereignty and self-government of all the nations aggrieved during the war as well as forbade any territorial changes to occur following the War without first acquiring the concurrence of the countries involved.

Despite these assuring pronouncements, just two years later at the Tehran Conference and officially at the Yalta Conference in the subsequent year, Churchill and Roosevelt not only recognized the iniquitous Line but also promised that what the Stalin stole in 1939 would be his after the War was over and withdrew their recognition of the rightful, democratically-elected Polish Government-in-Exile in favor of the illegitimate Soviet-imposed communist government.

At the same time, Polish soldiers were fighting and dying on all fronts in the Second World War — in the Battle of Britain, in Italy (Monte Cassino), in France (D-Day and Normandy), in North Africa, and on the Eastern Front, among other places — only to realize that once the War was over they had no free homeland to return to and that their sacrifices were ultimately in vain. Poland had the third largest Army in West fighting the Germans (after the U.S. and Britain); they saved England from destruction in the Battle of Britain; they opened the road of liberation to Rome and Paris and liberated Belgium and Holland; and yet, in return, the U.S. and Great Britain gave away Poland to be an enslaved satellite state of the Soviet Union.

World War II was by no means a moral victory for the Allies as Poland — the first among the Allies — was virulently betrayed. Congressman Philip A. Traynor articulately asserted: "On the shores of the Black Sea at Yalta, whether we liked it or not, as Americans we were represented by President Roosevelt in the fifth partition of Poland. [...] We are as culpable as Pilate. No more than he can we wash our hands of the consequences."²⁴ Each Partition was not

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Whats Your Legacy

Many people talk about leaving their will to worthy causes, but don't have a will, and do not realize it requires a will to do so. The laws of most states make it clear that personal property goes automatically, by law, to your nearest relative, even if they are quite distant ones, unless you have a legal will that says otherwise. If you have no relative, it goes to the state. More than half of all adult Americans die without having made their wills. Most of them undoubtedly planned to do so, but never got around to it. Some had wills but didn't keep them current. When you have a will, you should update it every few years as conditions change. Also, always name an executor who will carry out your wishes. Besides money, non-cash possessions can also be used and contributions and various donation plans can be carried out. Be a philanthropist: leave your stocks, bonds, real estate, art, valuable collection or insurance to continue the Polish - American traditions. Your will is the most important way of giving. When you're gone, it is a legacy that is not forgotten. In your will, you can specify what you would like your donation to be used for. For help in making your will, contact a competent lawyer. **The American Center of Polish Culture, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that needs your help and legacy.**

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