

HUNGARY AT CROSSROADS: WAR, PEACE, AND OCCUPATION
POLITICS (1918-1946)

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ABSTRACT

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Tipiođlu, Işıl

M.A., Department of International Relations

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July, 2019

This thesis traces the steps of the Hungarian foreign policy from 1918 to 1946, and analyzes the impact of revisionism after the Treaty of Trianon on Hungarian foreign policy decisions and calculations after the First World War. Placing the Hungarian revisionism at its center, this thesis shows the different situation Hungary had as a South European power as an ally of Germany throughout the Second World War and subsequently under the Soviet occupation. It also argues that it was the interlinked Hungarian foreign policy steps well before 1941, the official Hungarian participation in the war, which made Hungary a belligerent country. Also, based largely on the American archival documents, this study places Hungary into a retrospective framework of the immediate post-war era in Europe, where the strong adherence to Nazi Germany and the Hungarian revisionism shaped the future of the country.

Key Words: European Politics, Hungary, Revisionism, the Second World War, Twentieth Century

ÖZET

YOL AYRIMINDA MACARİSTAN: SAVAŞ, BARIŞ VE İŞGAL POLİTİKALARI (1918-1946)

Tipiođlu, Işıl

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü
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Bu tez, 1918'den 1946'ya kadar olan Macar dış politikası adımlarını takip ederek Trianon Antlaşması'ndan sonra ortaya çıkan Macar revizyonizminin, Macar dış politika kararlarında ve hesaplamalarındaki etkisini analiz etmektedir. Merkezinde Macar revizyonizmini ele alan bu tez, Macaristan'ın İkinci Dünya Savaşı boyunca bir Alman müttefiki olarak ve takiben sonraki Sovyet işgali altında bir Güney Avrupa gücü olarak farklı konumunu göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda bu tez, 1941 yılında Macaristan'ın fiili olarak savaşa katılmasından çok önce, birbiriyle bağlantılı Macar dış politika adımlarının Macaristan'ı savaşa taraf yapmış olduğunu ortaya sürmektedir. Büyük ölçüde Amerikan arşivlerine dayanılarak yapılan bu çalışma Macaristan'ı, Nazi Almanyası ve Macar revizyonizminin güçlü bir şekilde ülkenin geleceğini şekillendirdiği Avrupa'daki savaş sonrası dönemde retrospektif bir çerçeveye yerleştirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Politikası, İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Macaristan, Revizyonizm,
Yirminci Yüzyıl,

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Objective and Scope of the Thesis

The objective of this thesis is to analyze the impacts of Hungarian revisionism on its foreign policy calculations and to place Hungary and its strong adherence to the Nazi Germany even when the defeat was imminent, into a historical perspective and within the framework of the post-war Europe. This framework predominantly includes the diplomatic policies of the Great Powers –the United States, Soviet Union, and Great Britain. In addition to the Hungarian diplomacy in the light of revisionism, a breakdown of the military situation with the armistice negotiations in the background during the German, and later, Soviet occupations of Hungary is necessary to see the downfall of the Hungarian adherence to revisionism. What followed was a Soviet military dominance that gave way to the controlled but not thorough Soviet political control. The focus will be on the period from the beginning of the Regency of Miklós Horthy to the Soviet occupation of Hungary and the immediate post-war era. The presence of the Red Army

once set foot upon Hungary, set the tone for the political developments in Hungary as well as the camp it would be on in the Cold War.

The Treaty of Trianon, which Hungary signed on June 14, 1920, marked both the offset and a date of rebound for Hungarian foreign policy between the wars, and its revision became the primary tenet. The Treaty gave Slovakia and upper and western parts of Hungary as well as the Hungarian coronation city of Pozsony (Pressburg) to the Czechs; allotting the major portion of the partition with the entire Transylvania and its surrounding territories, part of Banat and Temesvár. Serbia took the remaining parts of Banat and Bácska; these territories taken from Hungary were merged with Croatia-Slovenia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Kingdom of Serbia itself to establish the new state of Yugoslavia. Moreover, Trianon gave Austria—which had no territorial claims against Hungary—the Burgenland. Poland was also given some 1000 km², and Italy received the Hungarian harbor city of Fiume.¹ Thus, with the treaty, Hungary turned into the smallest Eastern-European country in terms of territory, population, economic resources, and military might (See Figure 1). From then on, the Hungarian foreign policy had a single focus; the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The fact that the secession of territories of ‘historical Hungary’ did not happen overtime but with just a stroke of a pen by the dominant policies of the Great Powers, strengthened the Hungarian belief that a reversal of the Treaty must be exacted.

We could place Hungary’s role in the Second World War into the rest of the Axis countries; but in many ways its position was incomparable. What differentiated Hungary can only be grasped in retrospect, although a chronological look into its foreign policy

¹ Nicholas Horthy, *Memoirs* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 114.

and diplomatic fixation on territorial revision seems that the country was inevitable to follow that path. However, the claim of inevitability in history is nothing but obsolete. True, the domestic policy of a country is inseparable from its foreign policy as we see in the case of Hungary where all the other political goals had been subordinated to the Hungarian irredentism. This study asserts that Hungary had long forgotten the distinction between the unjust territory ‘grabs’ that disregarded the ethnic principle and the territorial secessions, which were a necessity from the perspective of historical course, just as the empires of Europe crumbled and gave way to nation-states. This Hungarian indifference and total adherence to revisionism automatically made a country like Nazi Germany the ideal ally regardless of other German political and military objectives. Hungary was both a German ally and an enemy country –occupied by Germany. Among all the Axis countries –Italy, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Finland –Hungary’s role and course was similar to that of Romania. The oil sources of both countries, the Romanian leading the way, were indispensable for Germany to keep up its war machine; both countries extended diplomatic and military support to Germany in its invasion of the Soviet Union. But Germany never occupied Romania. What we can ascertain from the events up until Hungary’s active participation in the Second World War is that its fanatical revisionism paved the way for its indissoluble bond with Hitler’s Germany. This was first marked with the First Vienna ‘Award’ of 1938.

The main argument of this study concerning the interwar Hungary is that it was well before 1941 that Hungary turned into a co-belligerent. The First Vienna ‘Award’ was the first step, which was seemingly a victory for Hungarian revisionism but as a matter of

fact, a bond with Germany. As reflected in the German-Hungarian diplomatic meetings, it was highly probable that if Hungary did not pursue pro-German policies from 1938 on, Hitler might as well use the ‘Award’ as blackmail for the integrity of Hungarian territories. We cannot offer an ‘alternative’ for the Hungarian foreign policy for the interwar and war years, nor does it rest within the objectives of the historiography. This thesis will attempt to bring the focus back on the revisionism that started and ended the Hungarian dreams of the restoration of ‘greater Hungary.’

1.2. Archival Sources and Literature

This study has made extensive use of the archives of the Foreign Relations of the United States. They particularly came in use on the years 1944-1946 when the American interest in the European peace came to the forefront. Other archival sources include the translated German Documents on Foreign Policy (GDFP) as well as the *Kriegstagebücher des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*. The GDFP documents that I could access covered the years between 1937 and 1941, pertaining to *Series D*. This series enlighten us as to the inner German foreign policy calculations; however, the papers on Hungary are very limited in scope. An unexpected but very useful source was from the Republic Archives of the Prime Ministry of Turkey (BCA) for the impact of the *Anschluss* on Hungarian and Italian foreign policy in a report by the Turkish Minister in Pest. For the Budapest Operation of the Soviet Union, the English-translated narratives of the Soviet General Military Staff came to my aid. Although it contains Soviet

propaganda in its explanation of military objectives, the minute details of the Budapest Operation in English have been very valuable.

I have approached Horthy's memoirs with due criticism. In his memoirs, Horthy argues that Hungary was a necessary geopolitical entity for Hitler's war machine. Unable to provide military support, which was not demanded at the beginning anyway, Hungary would contribute the raw materials and military transportation, which were exactly what Germany needed of Hungary. The argument goes that even if these former two were discarded, Germany wanted to keep a country like Hungary on its side for Hitler feared it seeing it on the Allied side as was seen in the cases of Denmark, Belgium, and Holland.² Horthy also finds the idea that Hungary could have resisted Germany both politically and militarily to be "nonsense."³ It is a flawed argument because Horthy presupposes the place of Hungary on the Axis side, disregarding the possibility even of a neutral stance during war. If we treat the neutrality as an unworkable policy objective, Hungary had completed all the steps to place itself on the Axis side; the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, which led to the break-up of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the Hungarian recognition of Japan's invasion and claim on Mainland China (1931), and leaving the League of Nations, to name a few. Moreover, the Hungarian revisionist ambitions steered the course of Hungarian policy actions regarding Germany, which seemed happy to oblige in return of greater military favors from Hungary. However, Horthy stretches the period of 'neutrality' for Hungary well into the late 1930s and marks the suicide of Pál Teleki as the end of Hungarian non-belligerency.⁴ This is,

² Horthy, *Memoirs*, 172.

³ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

to say the least, an almost-naïve and apologetic statement that impresses upon the modern reader that the tug of war swept over Hungary as fitting of the *Zeitgeist* of Hitler's Europe.

In the secondary literature on Hungary during the Second World War, a number of scholars, who have analyzed the domestic and foreign policies of Hungary during this period, are worth mentioning. Although it was written in the 1950s, Carlile Aylmer Macartney's two-volume work titled *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1945*⁵ is monumental and used in almost every study on Hungary that deals with the same period. The impact of the Hungarian revisionism on its international relations was best reflected in Joseph Rotschild and Nancy M. Wingfield's *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*⁶, which examines the political transition of European States in the Danubian basin with a retrospective look into their war-time politics. Rotschild's study on *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*⁷ has also been very useful to derive a general picture of South Eastern Europe between the 1920s to the 1940s. However, these two works focus on all the countries in this part of Europe with a general framework.

For the Hungarian military participation in Operation Barbarossa, Mario D. Fenyö's article, *Allied Axis Armies at Stalingrad*, and his book, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary:*

⁵ Carlile Aylmer Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary 1929-1945 Volume I and II* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956).

⁶ Joseph Rotschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷ Joseph Rotschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

*German-Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944*⁸ combine the German impact on Hungary with Hungary's military steps. These two works have guided me to blend the political decisions taken in the background with the realities of the war raging in the foreground. In writing the battle on the Don, the German and consequent Soviet operations in Hungary, in addition to the Soviet General Staff material I have made use of several works that especially focus on Hungary such as *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron*⁹ by Deborah S. Cornelius, who traces the Hungarian history from Béla Kun to its Soviet occupation; and another recent work by Krisztián Ungváry titled *Battle for Budapest*,¹⁰ which also gives minute details of the battle between the German forces and the Red Army. How the fight for control of the Budapest took place was analyzed in part by Anthony Beevor,¹¹ and Glantz and House.¹² For the Soviet and Anglo-American aims regarding Hungary, Michael Dobbs's book *Six Months in 1945*¹³ clearly sets forth the Allied motives and plans for entire Europe at Yalta. Dobbs avoids the cliché that Stalin had the spread of Communist ideology in his plans for Europe. The fact was, as Dobbs elaborates, the *realpolitik* in Stalin's post-war aims played a greater role and the reach of the Red Army determined the reach of the Soviet political influence over Europe.

⁸ Mario D. Fenyő, "The Allied Axis Armies at Stalingrad," *Military Affairs* 59, no. 2 (Summer 1965):57-72. *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary: German-Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

⁹ Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Krisztián Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest: One Hundred Days in World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

¹¹ Anthony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012)

¹² David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

¹³ Michael Dobbs, *Six Months in 1945: FDR, Stalin, Churchill, and Truman –From World War to Cold War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

As for the military terms, in order to avoid confusion I have used the shortened Arabic numbers to refer to the Soviet armies (i.e. *fronts*), divisions, and corps such as the 2nd *Ukrainian Front*. The full spelling is used to denote its German, Hungarian, Italian, and Romanian equivalents, such as *the Sixth Army*. A number of differences in reference to Russian and German military formations is that Soviet armored units use ‘tank’ divisions, corps etc. in contrast to the German use of ‘panzer’ for the very same units. The other is the Soviet’s ‘rifle’ units were German ‘infantry’ units.

CHAPTER II

HUNGARY BETWEEN THE WARS (1919-1939)

“The Hungarians are not our friends but our enemies.” – Clemenceau, 1919¹⁴

2.1. Hungary in Transition

Before the Treaty of Trianon and the declaration of the Hungarian kingdom, Hungary had undergone a few transitional periods that left an imprint both on the Hungarian mind and Hungarian foreign policy considerations in years to come. The first of those was the ineffective Károlyi regime. The symbol of the Aster Revolution (*Őszirózsás forradalom*), Count Mihály Karolyi ascended to power in October 1918, the last year of the Great War. Károlyi took on the role of representative of the workers in Parliament during the worker strikes in June. And later, he became the head of the newly-formed revolutionary National Council.

Károlyi sought to make better diplomatic ties with France as an alternative to the crumbling Germany and to cut its ties with Austria. Two months after taking office,

¹⁴ Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003), 263.

Károlyi declared Hungary a republic. Within the same month of November, Romania entered Cluj, the capital of Transylvania, not advancing further. The new Hungarian government also granted autonomy to the Ruthenians, Swabians, and Slovaks, living in the Hungarian territories.¹⁵ Károlyi was publicly known to be a follower of Wilson's Fourteen Points. Here, granting autonomy to the national minorities was not the central part; it was the restoration of the lost Hungarian territories that seemed to be attainable for Hungary in the Wilsonian policies.¹⁶ Therefore, a Hungarian military resistance to the Romanian occupation would have undermined the friendly relations Károlyi was trying to sustain with the victor powers. Yet, the Károlyi regime did not find extensive support by the Great Powers, who, by now, committed themselves to the Czechs, Slovaks, and other Southern Slavic peoples, who demanded total separation from Hungary. The only western power that was sympathetic to the Hungarian cause was Italy and its objective was to turn Hungary into an ally for the Italian demands on Yugoslavia.

On November 7, Károlyi sent a delegation to Belgrade for Hungary to be included in the negotiations for an armistice with French General Louis Franchet d'Esperey, the Allied commander of the Balkan armies.¹⁷ The Hungarian diplomatic protests against the territories lost to the Czechs and Romanians were met with indifference. The final blow was on March 20 when Ferdinand Vix, the head of the French military mission in

¹⁵ Joseph Rotschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 140. In Paris, Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovak minister of foreign affairs, demanded that Hungary evacuate Slovakia, which was complete by January 20, 1919. Tibor Hajdú and Zsuzsa L. Nagy, "Revolution, Counterrevolution, Consolidation," in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 299.

¹⁶ Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 259.

¹⁷ Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 10.

Budapest, transmitted the French Supreme Council Decision of Hungary's evacuation of the zone between the Tisza River and the eastern parts of the Hungarian plains as an ultimatum.¹⁸ The area that was asked of Hungary was to push Hungary approximately a hundred kilometers to the west. Moreover, accepting this ultimatum meant that practically nothing would stop Romania going deeper into Hungary. A Hungarian acceptance, Károlyi anticipated –and rightly so –would result in his fall and a subsequent revolution.¹⁹

The Hungarian reaction to the Vix Ultimatum was enormous; the public belief was that the Károlyi government was mistaken in its attempts to cooperate with the Entente. The government rejected the ultimatum, resigned, and handed down the power to the Social Democrats and Communists who formed an alliance. On March 21, 1919, the Revolutionary Governing Council proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic.²⁰ Real power now rested in the hands of Béla Kun. The Hungarian Communist experiment lasted for four months. The state intervention in economy as well as on religion quickly turned into state terror. The hundreds of property owners faced arrests by the government, which became known as the “Red Terror.” At the same time, outside Hungary, an opposition front was in the works. In Vienna and later in Széged, counter-revolutionary committees were set up. Those committees were under the leadership of Hungarian aristocrats, including the future prime ministers Pál Teleki, István Bethlen,

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 262.

²⁰ Istvan Deak, “Budapest and the Hungarian Revolutions of 1918-1919,” *the Slavonic and East European Review* 46, no. 106 (January 1968), 135.

Captain Gyula Gömbös among the members of the Széged committee calling for raising a national army.²¹

As the ‘Terror’ continued, on the border with Romania, there was a whole new different picture; by the end of April, Romanian and Czechoslovak armies had moved into Hungary and were in the vicinity of Budapest. The Romanian forces had already taken Nagyvárad, Arad, and Debrecen. The industrial area around Miskolc, and Salgótarján, which was twenty-five kilometers away from Budapest, were in the hands of the Czechoslovak Army.²² Relief was expected of the Ukrainian Red Army, which indeed checked the Romanian advance at the Tisza. The Hungarian forces were made up of the workers and supported by miners. They launched a counter-attack against the Czechs. This quickly turned into a steady Hungarian advance into Slovakia, which halted around the middle of June. By lack of military supplies and the French pressure, the Hungarian Red Army retreated from Slovakia.

By that time the Hungarian political leadership lost its political leverage; the fact that Béla Kun and his Communist circle were Jewish also fueled anti-Semitism in the country. The Romanian Army was pressing deeper into Hungary and all the Hungarian counter-attacks were met with more resistance. The military situation was desperate. On August 1, the Hungarian Governing Council with Kun at its head presented its resignation and escaped to Vienna. Two days later, the Romanian Army was in Budapest.²³ Meanwhile, the Yugoslavs and Czechoslovaks drove deeper into Hungary.

²¹ Bela Bodo, “Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (October 2010), 709.

²² Hajdú and Nagy, “Revolution, Counterrevolution, Consolidation,” 306.

²³ Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 267.

In the countryside, there was resistance both to Budapest and its failed policies, the National Army under the command of Horthy, arrived at Siófok in Transdanubia, which was not under Romanian occupation. The National Army was an independent body with no ties to the government in Budapest. The Army did not come into direct military contact with the Romanians, but it was with orders to execute those supported by the Soviet Republic.²⁴ The paramilitary detachments carried out pogroms aimed directly at Jews and Communists which came to be called the ‘White Terror.’

The Romanian troops looted Budapest and the surrounding areas; they stayed until the middle of November after the Romanians, Miklós Horthy entered the capital with his National Széged Army and made an agreement with a British diplomat, Sir George Russell Clerk, who was sent by the Paris peace-makers, to form an alliance. A counterrevolutionary government with István Friedrich as its prime minister and Horthy as the commander-in-chief of the army ruled three months until a new government that also had Socialist representatives replaced it in November.²⁵ Immediately after, the general elections followed, in which the Communist and Socialist parties were not able to participate.

The newly-established Hungarian assembly passed a law, declaring Hungary to be a kingdom. But instead of electing a monarch, it followed a medieval precedent and appointed a regent until a monarch could replace him.²⁶ On March 1, 1920, the last Commander-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy and the aide-de-camp of the

²⁴Bodo, “Hungaritan Aristocracy”, 716.

²⁵ Rotschild, *East Central Europe*, 152.

²⁶ As Miklós Horthy notes this practice dates back to 1446 when Hunyadi János acted as Regent until 1452 with the title “Főméltoságu,” –High Dignitary. Nicholas Horthy. *Memoirs* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 111.

Austro-Hungarian emperor Francis Joseph, Miklós Horthy was elected as regent. Horthy had played an active and audacious role at the Battle of Otranto, the greatest sea engagement in the Adriatic, directing his forces while he was wounded on a stretcher on a ship for hours. As regent, Horthy was able to exercise as much power as a monarch. He could choose the prime minister, convene, prorogue, and dissolve Parliament. Officers pledged allegiance to him as they had done to the emperor of Austro-Hungary. Democracy was embraced only partially. The adherents of the old regime were content with pluralistic but restricted 'democracy' so long as they were able to work it out to their advantage. The fear of Bolshevism produced toleration to democracy that could withstand direct manipulation. However, this manipulation came in the form of populist nationalism and irredentism.

Although the position of regent was considered to be temporary, Horthy would rule Hungary even into the Second World War, for more than twenty years. The Horthy regime would come to be identified with Hungary between the wars. Besides nationalism and conservatism, fervent anti-Communism and a political adherence to the aristocracy as the pre-eminent social class defined the Horthy era.²⁷ Horthy aligned the course of the Hungarian politics with that of Germany and was aware early on that although Hungary would follow Germany into a European war, if they did not win,

²⁷ Steven B. Vardy, "The Impact of Trianon Upon Hungary and the Hungarian Mind: the Nature of Hungarian Irredentism," *Hungarian Studies Review* X, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 26.

Hungary would not exist on the map anymore.²⁸ Two weeks after Horthy's election, a new coalition government went to Paris to sign the new peace treaty.

2.2. The Signing of 'Trianon'

The Treaty of Trianon, which Hungary signed on June 14, 1920, marked both the offset and date of rebound for Hungarian foreign policy between the wars, and its revision, the primary tenet. Interwar Hungary had many political, economic, and social fluctuations, but these were shadowed by the "Trianon Syndrome," which set the course for Hungary after the Great War.²⁹ The Hungarian reaction to Trianon was excessively emotional and politically all-consuming. The peaceful revision of the treaty had never been an option, for Hungary aligned itself with the other countries such as Italy, and later, Germany – countries that were not content with the conclusion of peace after the First World War, either. To make sense of the Hungarian policy decisions and fluctuations during the Second World War, as well as what that war cost to the country, we need to look deeper into Hungary between the wars and the diplomatic commitments and diplomatic renunciations it had formed.

²⁸ "Ein verlonerer Krieg würde Ungarn von der Landkarte verschwinden machen," noted Horthy before he met the Führer in 1936. Pál Pritz, "Hungarian Foreign Policy between Revisionism and Vassalage," *Foreign Policy Review* (2011):104.

²⁹ After the end of the war, the Hungarian borders were back as the treaty dictated. Thus, the syndrome did not lose prominence even after the Second World War.

The Treaty of Trianon took two-thirds of Hungary's territories, three-fifths of its population (See Table 1). Before the Great War, the Hungarian population was close to 20 million; now Hungary had only 7,615,117 people. The Hungarians had become the second biggest Diaspora in the world, and the biggest ethnic minority in Europe (with Transylvanian Hungarians in Romania).³⁰ The territories Romania had absorbed from Hungary were bigger than the newly-created Hungary. The military, on the other hand, was reduced to 35,000 officers and men only to maintain order and for the security of frontiers. Mobilization and creation of general staff were forbidden as well as an air force and armored units. The economic structure also went under a major change; Hungary now had only 16 percent of its forests, and 11 percent of its oil production.³¹ The country's dependence on foreign trade rose up. At the beginning of the 1920s, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia allied –the Little Entente – allied to deter any possible Hungarian effort to revise the treaty.³² The Entente, empowered by the French, was to make sure that Hungary would only have reduced territories under the Treaty.

³⁰ Tibor Frank, "Treaty Revision and doublespeak: Hungarian neutrality 1939-1941," in *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents During the Second World War*, ed. Neville Wylie (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151.

³¹ Hajdú and Nagy, "Revolution, Counterrevolution, Consolidation," 314.

³² Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 33.

TABLE I:

Hungarian territorial and populational losses as a result of the Treaty of Trianon (per 1910 data)³³			
	Area (square km)	Population (in total)	Magyars(linguistics)
'Historic' Hungary (without Croatia-Slovenia) ³⁴	282,870	18,264,533	9,944,627
<i>Lost to:</i>			
Austria	4,020	291,618	26,153
Czechoslovakia	61,633	3,517,568	1,066,685
Poland	589	23,662	230
Romania	103,093	5,257,467	1,661,805
Yugoslavia	20,551	1,509,295	452,265
Italy	21	49,806	6,493
Total Losses	189,907	10,649,416	3,213,631
Truncated Hungary	92,963	7,615,117	6,730,996

Thus, Trianon was a turning point as well as a traumatic event for Hungary; it set the Hungarian foreign policy moves both for the interwar period and even well into the Second World War. The Hungarian revisionism had become a national ambition, a rallying point for people from all political spectrums. With the revision as the central focus, the Hungarian foreign policy also consolidated on two other priorities; making Hungary a bulwark against Bolshevism in Central Europe, and building and maintaining

³³ All the statistics are taken from Rotschild, *East Central Europe*, 155.

³⁴ If we are not to consider these territories part of 'historic Hungary' as Croatia-Slovenia had become part of Hungarian territories in 1102 when the Croation crown was passed into Árpád dynasty. Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526* (New York: I.B: Tauris, 2001), 35.

friendly relations with great European powers –Germany, Italy, and Great Britain, in particular.³⁵ The Hungarian answer for the Trianon was one: “*Nem, nem, soha!*”(“No, no, never!”) (See Figure 2).

The ruling class was largely estate owners, and the middle class, who wished to see Hungary retain its old traditions in economy, politics, and society. They gravitated toward the parliamentary government as the ideal form, which they thought, managed to balance the right and left spectrums in Hungary. The counts István Bethlen and Pál Teleki were the pioneers of this concept. In July 1920, Count Pál Teleki formed a new government. His government aimed to reduce the influence of the rightist extremists in Hungarian politics. The Hungarian Communist Party was also banned in 1921. The political upheaval continued with a debate over whether the monarchy should be restored in full. The legitimists had no support from the extreme right, which had militarization as one of its aims. Under the monarchy, they believed, it would be unattainable to do so. The Great Powers also opposed the resumption of the Hungarian monarchy.³⁶ The crisis over the monarchy drove the Teleki government out of office.

To put the post-Trianon political objectives into action, in the immediate post-First World War period, Count István Bethlen, Hungary’s longest-lasting prime minister in office (1921-1931) of Transylvanian origin, sought to place Hungary into the newly-built political and economic machine of Europe. This integration and seeking new

³⁵ Horthy especially gravitated toward Britain, which helped Horthy ascend to the Regency. Added to this gravitation was the French supported the Little Entente and the United States simply did not take any interest in Hungarian affairs. Frank, “Treaty revision and doublespeak,” 154.

³⁶ In 1921, Charles IV, who resided in Switzerland, went to Hungary with the backing of the legitimists and Teleki government. Horthy had the support of France as well as the rejection by Hungary’s neighbors that feared the resurrection of the Dual Monarchy. Thereupon, Charles IV was forced to leave Hungary. Hajdú and Nagy, “Revolution, Counterrevolution, Consolidation,” 318. Charles IV made a second attempt to take the Hungarian throne in October, which also failed.

reliable partners for a country with hostile neighbors shaped Bethlen's policies. Bethlen opened negotiations with the Entente countries to settle the question of the Burgenland and the territorial dispute with Yugoslavia over the regions around Pécs. The latter dispute was solved when Yugoslavia abided by the Paris settlements and evacuated the regions it occupied. As for the Burgenland, Italy acted as a mediator between Austria and Hungary, and except for Sopron, Austria took Burgenland.³⁷

In 1922, Hungary gained membership in the League of Nations and acquired loans from the League.³⁸ To find support for its revisionism, Hungary turned to Great Britain. However, Bethlen was aware that the British would not directly support them especially in observance of the Treaty of Trianon. What best describes the British stance on these Hungarian claims is the British Foreign Secretary (1919-1924), Lord Curzon's statement that Hungary could gain prosperity only through the "abandonment of such dreams as Hungarian political parties seem freely to indulge in of recovering the position that Hungary formerly held in Central Europe."³⁹

2.3. Hungary and the Axis Camp

In the years between 1921 and 1926, Bethlen tried to find a common political ground with Hungary's neighbors as well as with the Central Powers. France was on the camp of the Little Entente, and Great Britain had its influence down to a minimum in Central

³⁷ In Sopron, the two parties agreed to a plebiscite, whose outcome gave the region to Hungary. Mária Ormos, "The Early Interwar Years, 1921-1938," in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 320.

³⁸ Frank, "Treaty revision and doublespeak," 155.

³⁹ Thomas Sakmyster, "István Bethlen and Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1921-1931," *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* V, no. 2 (Fall 1978):7.

Europe. Italy came forward as the ideal partner. In 1927, Hungary signed a treaty of friendship with Italy. What united these two countries was the case of Yugoslavia; Italy wished to see Yugoslavia isolated, and an East-European ally to counter the French influence in the Danube region. Hungary also had lost territories to Yugoslavia, thus, with a strong European ally; Hungary would be a hectoring power in the region, at least, diplomatically. Until the German-Hungarian relations developed and steered the course and fate of Hungary with the rise of Hitler, Italy was the greatest ally that supported the Hungarian irredentist claims; and the Treaty of 1927 would remain the only bilateral agreement Hungary made with a Great Power until joining in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1939.⁴⁰

The Bethlen era called for territorial expansion and revision of the lost Hungarian territories, Bánát, Slovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine, and parts of Romania, moderate revisionism, limiting the Hungarian claims only to the areas where the Hungarian populations were dominant.⁴¹ His establishment of closer ties with both Italy and Germany set the course of the rest of the Hungarian foreign policy on the Axis side. Yet, Bethlen seemed to have left room to maneuver toward the other Western countries, when he stepped down in 1931. After the Bethlen government, Horthy had appointed Count Gyula Károlyi as prime minister. His administration was short-lived; the foreign policy aimed at a return into the orbit of Western Europe so as to bring order to the

⁴⁰ Sakmyster, "István Bethlen," 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13

Hungarian economy. Károlyi resigned on September 21, 1932. In his stead, Horthy asked Gömbös to form a new government.⁴²

General Gyula Gömbös pushed Hungary into the radical right.⁴³ A new era in Hungarian politics had begun. Horthy and his circle had all been born and grown up during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; its values and culture had been embedded in them. The higher officers had started in the Habsburg army and participated in the Great War. The former prime ministers –Bethlen, Teleki, and Károlyi –were all counts; the political leaders were mostly the great landowners and finance magnates. Gömbös, on the other hand, was the son of a Lutheran teacher of German ancestry. He represented a new middle class as his generation grew up in the nationalist spirit of truncated Hungary.

His appointment as prime minister in October 1932 coincided with the electoral victory of the National Socialist Party in Germany. On January 30, 1933, Hitler came to power. And in June 1933, Gömbös became the first European leader to meet with Hitler. But his political designs and a possible common ground for Hungary and Germany met with indifference by the German leader. Hungary's revisionism was not on Hitler's political agenda. His support was stronger only in the issue of destroying Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴

Gömbös' primary goal was a German-Hungarian-Italian partnership; this carried the country further into the Axis camp and to an increase of the pro-German elements both in the government and the army.⁴⁵ Gömbös expected that Hungary would be able to

⁴² Mária Ormos, "The Early Interwar Years, 1921-1938," 331.

⁴³ Gömbös was instrumental in organizing the National Army at Széged, was a popular candidate. In the early 1920s he advocated the idea of Hungary as a one-party state and was the leader of an anti-Semitic group within the army. But through the late 1920s he had more moderate political views. In 1929 he became minister of defense.

⁴⁴ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 53.

⁴⁵ Vardy, "The Impact of Trianon Upon Hungary," 30

press on its revisionist demands with a power balance and support by Germany and Italy in Europe.

On March 17, 1934, Hungary, Italy, and Austria signed the Rome Protocols, guaranteeing consultation in case of an external threat to any of these three parties.⁴⁶ This was a retaliatory pact against the newly concluded Balkan Pact that renounced the existing revisionist territorial claims in the Balkans. But Gömbös also secured a guarantee of support by the Italians, who did not consolidate their bond with the Germans and disfavored strong German influence over the Danubian countries such as Hungary and Austria. In the fall of 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. A year later, the League of Nations denounced the Italian invasion and placed an economic embargo against Italy.⁴⁷ This news worried Hungary enormously for Italy's tie-down in Africa would leave no other Central European power to defend the Hungarian interests in the region; however, the embargo compelled Mussolini to have closer ties with Germany. In the meantime, Germany was distancing itself from Hungary and endeavoring for better relations with Romania.⁴⁸ The next year, Germany and Austria signed an agreement that tied the Austrian foreign policy to that of Germany, although Germany had recognized the independence of Austria. This agreement caused Italy to take on a more cautious policy toward Germany. Thus, not leaning on either side, Gömbös' balance between Berlin and Rome continued. The interpretation of such an agreement was that now Hungary would have a more free hand in handling its foreign policy without fear of

⁴⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 85.

⁴⁷ Peter Pastor, "Hungarian-Soviet Diplomatic Relations 1935-1941: A Failed Rapprochement," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 5 (July 2004):733.

⁴⁸ Ormos, "The Early Interwar Years," 335.

diplomatic repercussions from Germany.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry was well aware that their country was incapable of giving military guarantees to Austria in case of a German attack.⁵⁰

Simultaneously, Hungary maintained its diplomatic contacts with Moscow. Budapest's request was the Soviet support of Hungarian revisionist claims that was born out of Trianon, as well as support for Hungary's right to rearm like its neighbors in Central Europe. However, the Soviet Union would ask for Hungary acting as a barrier against the growing German expansion toward Eastern Europe.⁵¹ This was not a commitment Hungary would be willing to make as its previous policies concerning Germany proved, although Germany did not support all the Hungarian territorial claims except that on Czechoslovakia. Coupled with an inconsistent foreign policy, Gömbös' control over the domestic affairs was not faring well, either. As a result, the government lost the majority in Parliament. By that time, Gömbös was seriously ill; he died in 1936.

Horthy wanted a candidate that would be able to balance the foreign policy and save the country from a complete commitment to the pro-Axis policy. For that, Kálman Darányi appeared to be the ideal candidate. Darányi had conservative political leanings, which aligned him with the camp of aristocrats and financial bosses in the Government Party.⁵² By appointing Darányi, Horthy hoped to keep Hungary's foreign policy options as wide

⁴⁹ Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi [=BCA], 1936: 30 10 / 231-557-10.

⁵⁰ The Hungarian administration also found *Anschluss* a crisis of the decision of the Great Powers that split Europe into small states. Betty Jo Winchester, "Hungary and the 'Third Europe' in 1938," *Slavic Review* 32, no.4 (December 1973):744.

⁵¹ Pastor, "Hungarian-Soviet Diplomatic Relations," 734.

⁵² Betty Jo Winchester, "Hungary and the Austrian Anschluss," *East European Quarterly* X, no. 4 (1976), 414.

as possible to benefit from the ever-changing and critical events in Central Europe for the sake of the Hungarian revisionism.

In spring 1938, with a Hungarian delegation, Darányi visited Berlin where Hungary's way of seeking a separate agreement with the Little Entente was criticized as a sign of the Hungarian deviation from the Hungarian-German cooperation. The German government gave the Hungarian delegation an overview of the German plans for the Danubian Region, especially the fate of Czechoslovakia. The German support for the Hungarian revision would be directed toward the Czechoslovak question. On other territorial claims, Germany made no definitive promises for the time being.⁵³ After the visit to Berlin, Darányi oriented the Hungarian policy more toward Germany and caused the talks with the Little Entente to be stalled.⁵⁴ However, Germany did not openly support the Hungarian claims in Slovakia and Ruthenia –the territories of Felvidék. The only assurance given was that Germany did not have any claims over this region. On March 12, 1938, the last year of the European peace, Hitler incorporated Austria into the German Reich with the *Anschluss*; now Hungary became contiguous with Germany. This development meant, above all, that Germany became even greater direct influence over Hungary. The Hungarian government was the first to congratulate Germany on the acquisition. Following the *Anschluss*, the extreme right, including the Arrow-Cross Party, gained popular support and interest.⁵⁵ Darányi gave approval of these rising

⁵³ Gyula Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy 1919-1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 132.

⁵⁴ Magda Ádám, "The Munich crisis and Hungary: the fall of the Versailles settlement in central Europe," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 10, no. 3, n.d., 86.

⁵⁵ The Arrow-Cross Party had been founded in the 1930s as some right-wing parties merged. Its political vision consisted of enmity toward the short-lived Communist influence in Hungary in 1919, anti-Semitism, and fostering of feudal structures, and it was an ardent follower of Nazism in Hungary. Its roots went back to Ferenc Szálasi's Party of the National Will in 1935. Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 244.

rightist leanings by introducing the first anti-Jewish Bill as well as closing down leftist papers.

In order to put Hungary back into a West-oriented path, Horthy appointed Bela Imrédy as prime minister due to his pro-Western, especially pro-British ties. Meanwhile, as Hitler's intentions toward Czechoslovakia were shaped, Imrédy's cautious policy that Hungary would not act to integrate any part of Czechoslovakia unless the country was in disintegration, found support by the Regent Horthy as well. Such a move, the Regent was well aware, would drag Great Britain into the war.⁵⁶ A certain political pattern emerged with the closer relations with Germany, which directly gave rise to the far-right in Hungary. Whenever the newly-appointed government would cross the line Horthy and his circle would deem inappropriate or overly pro-German, another seemingly moderate candidate would take its place that went even beyond the accepted limits of Axis friendship.⁵⁷ However one thing that did not alter is the belief that it would be Germany only who could realize the Hungarian hopes of revisionism.

Between Germany and Italy, Hungary sought to find a balance with the Little Entente. The reason for Hungary's non-adherence to any of these three political camps was that his revisionism did not find full support in any of them. Choosing a side meant an irrevocable commitment that did not guarantee the realization of Hungarian irredentism. Thus, regardless of their political orientation, the Hungarian prime minister, all endorsed by Horthy, would seek to pursue this sole goal, currying favor with every power that had

⁵⁶ This fear of Western military interference in the Czechoslovak affair slowed down the Hungarian pace with regard to its full support for Germany in a military crisis. Thomas Sakmyster, "Hungary and the Munich Crisis: The Revisionist Dilemma," *Slavic Review* 32, no. 4 (December 1973), 734.

⁵⁷ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 135.

a say in the region. In light of this, the negotiations with the Little Entente encompassed renunciation of war and the protection of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania. The agreement that also included Hungary's right to rearm, was signed in Bled, Yugoslavia, on August 23, 1938.⁵⁸ The Bled Agreement was a sign that Hungary was not solely dependent on Berlin to navigate its foreign policy in South-eastern Europe.

The Munich Agreement in 1938 has always been acknowledged as Germany's violation of Czechoslovak territorial integrity. At the same time, the later dissolution of Czechoslovakia was also an opportunity, and Hungary was quick to grab it in its northern neighbor. As much as a German affair, Hitler made sure to turn the Czechoslovak disintegration into a European affair, a revision of the unjust treaties after the Great War. The Germans and the Hungarians referred to Czechoslovakia as a *Saisonstaat*, a country that was born out of favorable circumstances at the end of the Great War, thus, it was liable to dissolution if the climate changed to the detriment of its existence.⁵⁹ For the invasion, Germany had asked nothing of Hungary and Hungary was content that Germany did not give any ultimatums for participation in the invasion.⁶⁰

So, when Germany, together with Italy, 'awarded' Kassa (Kosice), Munkács, and Ungvár to Hungary at an arbitrational summit in Vienna. With the 'Award,' Hitler managed to decentralize the affair away from Germany. The First Vienna 'Award,' dated November 2, 1938, gave territories from the former Hungarian Uplands in

⁵⁸ Winchester, "Hungary and the 'Third Europe'," 746.

⁵⁹ Stephen Borsody, *the Triumph of Tyranny: the Nazi and Soviet Conquest of Central Europe* (Great Britain: Macmillan Company, 1960), 81.

⁶⁰ Documents on German Foreign Policy [=DGFP], Minute by the State Secretary (Weizsäcker) for the Foreign Minister's Secretariat, August 23, 1938. F18/371-374.

Slovakia and southern Carpathian Ruthenia, 11,927 km² with its 869,299 population, 86.5 percent of whom were Hungarians.⁶¹ The arbitrary decision was carried under the supervision of German Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop, and Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, and was part of the partitioning of Czechoslovakia.

The Hungarian justification was that as a member of the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia did not abide by the agreements they signed, which included the protection of minorities, as well as the claim that on the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border, clashes were constant.⁶² Of all the five cities Hungary wanted to have, only three were returned to Hungary.⁶³ Before the First Vienna Award, Hitler had had the bridgehead in Pressburg⁶⁴ and the neighboring territories. Hungary resented this German grab as they considered this area part of Hungary. As for eastern Slovakia, Hungarian claim was merely a “frontier rectification,” as they explained to the Germans.⁶⁵ Additionally, the Hungarian government was keeping tabs on the German-Romanian relations. A recently-concluded economic treaty between the Romanian and German governments raised the question whether there were any political concessions attached to it, which the German Foreign Ministry was quick to deny.⁶⁶

In January 1939, Imrédy tried to pursue a foreign policy that would put Hungary under even heavier German influence. He replaced the Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya with Count István Csáky. Germany did not like Kánya as he promoted and signed the Bled Agreement. Count Csáky made Hungary join the Anti-Comintern Pact and leave the

⁶¹ Frank, “Treaty Revision,” 156.

⁶² Horthy, *Memoirs*, 167.

⁶³ Pastor, “Hungarian-Soviet Diplomatic Relations,” 737.

⁶⁴ Also known as Pozsony and Bratislava.

⁶⁵ DGFP, Minute by an Official of the Foreign Minister’s Secretariat, March 23, 1939, 2313/484508.

⁶⁶ DGFP, Memorandum by the State Secretary, March 25, 1939. 169/82515,

League of Nations.⁶⁷ This first policy move severed the Hungarian-Soviet relations.⁶⁸ The Imrédy government complied completely with the German foreign policy. The Hungarian demand for the annexation of Carpatho-Ukraine (or Ruthenia)⁶⁹ drove a wedge between Berlin and Budapest. The Hungarian demand arose from a political calculation that would give Hungary room to maneuver in the region. A common border with Poland would vitiate the Little Entente as well as Germany, which now increased its political pressure on Hungary because of the *Anschluss*. Germany did not give its consent for the Hungarian annexation exactly for the same reasons Hungary wanted to take it. An independent revisionist move by Hungary would render German help useless and the Hungarian state less reliant. There was no hope of support from Rome, either. The German and Italian governments referred to the ‘Vienna Award,’ as binding for the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontiers. Yet, Budapest pressed on with their demands, this time appealing to their common cause of defense against Bolshevist influence.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ This public wish was materialized during the prime ministry of Teleki when Hungary did indeed leave the League on April 11, 1939. Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 150.

⁶⁸ Loránd Tilkovszky, “The Late Interwar Years and World War II,” in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 340.

⁶⁹ Hungary had controlled the region for hundreds of years but after the Great War, the Great Powers had given the region to Czechoslovakia in 1919 on the condition of making it autonomous when the Hungarian demands for it lost its effect under the Communist Kun regime. Stalin would retain Carpatho-Ukraine in 1944. Rotschild, *East Central Europe*, 83-84.

⁷⁰ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 147.

CHAPTER III

HUNGARY AND THE BREAK UP OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

3.1. Armed Neutrality

The Prime minister after February 16, 1939, was Count Pál Teleki. He sought to maintain friendly relations with both Italy and Germany but was unwilling to participate on the side of Germany in a war.⁷¹ His foreign policy was essentially ‘armed neutrality’. However, the Hungarian occupation of the rest of Ruthenia in March 1939 was a step outside this ‘neutral’ stance. The Hungarian grab of Carpatho-Ukraine was the extension of the thorough liquidation of Czechoslovakia and took place with the approval of Germany.⁷² A neutral stance could not hold fast in the face of ambitious revisionist goals. Teleki re-introduced the Hungarian claim on Carpatho-Ukraine in the form of geopolitical needs as he could hardly base it off ethnic lines. The prime objective on the Hungarian foreign policy agenda remained to be the annexation of Carpatho-Ukraine. A

⁷¹ This distrust seemed to be shared by Count Ciano, who noted that “any kind of alliance with them [the Germans] becomes a bad alliance in a little.” Galeazzo Ciano, August 27, 1939, 130.

⁷² Bohemia and Ruthenia had been incorporated into Germany and Slovakia remained independent but as a German satellite. Tilkovszky, “The Late Interwar Years,” 341.

month later, on March 10, Slovakia declared its cessation from Czechoslovakia and made appeals to Germany for to be placed under their protection. Teleki acted promptly: he convened the ministers and issued a statement that Hungary would occupy Carpatho-Ukraine if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia.⁷³ Hitler ‘relented’ to the Hungarian decision at the cost of several binding conditions for Hungary: the recognition of previous German treaties with the autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine government, respect of the rights of the German minority in the region, and political immunity to the politicians of the regime there. With a free hand authorized by Hitler, Hungary advanced into Carpatho-Ukraine on March 14. In the public eye, the invasion appeared as an independent Hungarian action that proved the *Honvéd*’s might. But the invasion of Carpatho-Ukraine was part of the end of Czechoslovak dissolution and Hungary, blinded by its revisionist ambitions warily contributed to the consolidation of Nazi dominance in the Danubian basin.

Teleki avoided any involvement in the invasion of Poland, which would be the beginning of German distrust toward Hungary later in the war. Shortly before the German invasion of Poland, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Istvan Csáky, visited Berchtesgaden where he was told that the Hungarian refusal to join in military operations against Poland out of moral reasons⁷⁴ was unacceptable as Germany supported Hungarian revisionism in the past two years with tangible results.⁷⁵ After this unofficial berating, Hungary decided not to declare its neutrality. The revisionist claims

⁷³ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 153.

⁷⁴ In an enclosed letter to Hitler, Teleki also raised the Hungarian moral concern. See DGFP, *Memorandum by the State Secretary*, July 24, 1939, 73/5194045, Vol VI.

⁷⁵ DGFP, *Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister’s Personal Staff*, April 29, 1939 F13/400-10. Also, Germany did not ask for any active participation from Hungary in the invasion of Poland but demanded that they use the Hungarian railways for troop transportation. Also see Frank, “Treaty Revision and doublespeak,” 160-162.

were, in a way, *raison d'être* of the Hungarian state; the Hungarian government did not wish to make any contrary moves that would risk the loss of the newly-acquired territories. However, as a cautionary step, Hungary consulted Italy on the issue of granting Germany passage through Hungary to Poland.⁷⁶ The armed neutrality consisted of currying favor with Germany on the territorial issues and adopting its policy according to that of the Axis.⁷⁷ From the Italian perspective, Hungary was intransigent and tended to accept favors from Italy as long as it first solicited.⁷⁸ In fact, this was part of Teleki's political agenda; he sought the Italian support as a counter-balance to the growing German economic and political influence. All the while, Hungary sustained its revisionism, this time directed toward Transylvania. The issue of a possible Romanian aggression on the Hungarian border also dominated the talks at Berchtesgaden. The Foreign Minister Csáky referred to the Romanian attack on Austro-Hungary and consequent invasion of Transylvania in 1916 when the Empire faced the Brusilov offensive in Lutsk.⁷⁹ Now Hungary awaited a similar opportunity, a moment of weakness on the Hungarian part, to arise for Romania to invade Hungarian territories. The Trianon 'Syndrome' brought along a fear of a military clash with Romania that never materialized but Hungary always used it as a pretext for avoiding complete commitment to the foreign policy of the Third Reich.

After September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, the question of granting Germany *droit de passage* to Poland became the epicenter of Hungarian foreign policy.

⁷⁶ Mussolini advised the Hungarian delegates to "turn down the German demand as courteously as they can." Ciano, September 9, 1939, 141. Two days later, Ciano commented that the Hungarian refusal of passage to the Germans would have a pay-off afterwards.

⁷⁷ Ciano, April 20, 1939, 148.

⁷⁸ Ciano, April 30, 1939, 74.

⁷⁹ DGFP, Memorandum by the Minister in Hungary, August 8, 1939, F5/0103-113.

The Hungarian calculation expounded that their resistance to the German demand of free passage to Poland would win the favor of the British, thus accordingly, all the public explanations abode by this calculation, asserting that Hungary would not get involved in a war with Poland in any way. Hungary based this logic on the history they shared with Poland, too.⁸⁰ Although Germany offered the oil wells of the Sambor region in return, Hungary opted to resort to the Italian opinion, which advised Hungary to avoid any political or military involvement without provoking Germany.⁸¹ The Hungarian neutrality through the invasion of Poland persisted while Germany did not turn its requests into demands from Hungary. Furthermore, Hungary even opened its border to some 140,000 Polish refugees, who were mostly soldiers;⁸² this and its neutrality would later to be held against it by the Germans. Through the middle of September, the Soviet Union invaded eastern Poland, which was guaranteed under the secret clauses of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Now the Soviet Union was at the door of Hungary and the threshold was about 150 kilometers long. The fear of a revival of the Communist upsurge as it was in 1919 intensified the fears of the Hungarian ruling circles.⁸³ The re-establishment of friendly relations with the Soviet Union after the invasion of Poland was a move to curb that possible influence. In November 1939, the idea of forming a neutral bloc in Central Europe against the Balkan Pact became a current issue, first raised by Italy and found disapproval from Germany. Romania later endorsed such a

⁸⁰ These two peoples, the Hungarians and the Poles, possessed a “centuries old friendship” after all. Stephen Báthory, the Prince of Transylvania ruled Poland, well before the Habsburgs, the Jagiello dynasty had the Hungarians under their rule. And moreover, Hungary and Poland had never been at war with each other. Horthy, *Memoirs*, 155.

⁸¹ Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary 1929-1945* Volume I (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956), 366.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 368.

⁸³ Tilkovszky, “The Late Interwar Years,” 342.

bloc whose main provision would be a declaration of neutrality among the participating states.⁸⁴

3.2. The German Impact on the Hungarian Foreign Policy

The year 1940 altered the convictions of the Hungarian ruling classes as Germany advanced into the heart of Europe with the *Blitzkrieg* into France. Germany now seemed invincible. Thus, for the question of a re-settlement of the question of Transylvanian territories, Hungary turned to Germany. Arbitrating on behalf of both Romania and Hungary and giving a guarantee of clearing those two Central East European countries of potential disturbances in the near future, Hitler gave Hungary northern Transylvania and the Székelyföld (easternmost Transylvania). On August 30, 1940, Germany and Italy as arbiters assigned the “Second Vienna Award” at the Belvedere Palace in Vienna. The “Award” gave Hungary approximately 43,000 km² of northern Transylvania.⁸⁵ The disputed territory was virtually cut in half to appeal to Romania and Hungary.⁸⁶ Again, Hungary was able to revise the map of Europe. But this time neither side was content

⁸⁴ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 168.

⁸⁵ The towns of Máramarossziget, Szatmárnemeti, Nagyvárad, Koloszvár, and Marosvásárhely were given to Hungary with 2.5 million inhabitants in total. Romania got to keep Brassó, Nagyszeben, Segesvár, Arad, and Temesvár. Horthy, *Memoirs*, 180.

⁸⁶ Transylvania had been home to the Hungarians ever since they conquered the Carpathian basin in the 9th century. From the late 16th to the late 17th centuries, the Ottomans and the Habsburgs tried to dominate the region. In the 1690s, the Ottoman influence over Transylvania dissipated, giving way for the Habsburgs to rule over the entire Hungary. The Hungarians gained autonomy to a certain degree in the Revolution of 1848; but more effectively in *Ausgleich* of 1867 with the Habsburg Empire. From then to the end of the Great War, Transylvania was under the direct Hungarian rule. After the war, Romania occupied Transylvania in 1919, and later officially acquired Transylvania with the signing of the Treaty of Trianon through the influence of the Great Powers. See Nándor F. Dreisziger, “Transylvania in International Power Politics during World War II,” *Hungarian Studies Review* XXXVI, no. 1-2 (2009): 86-87.

with the outcome of this arbitration. When both parties saw the revised borders on the map, the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mihail, Manoilescu, fainted.⁸⁷ With the Second ‘Award’, Hungary re-annexed two-fifths of its Trianon losses but Romania was able to retain the economically vital parts of Transylvania. Hitler figured that for the invasion of the Soviet Union, which was just taking shape as a plan, he needed the Hungarian lines of transportation. So, in order to utilize them in the near future, Germany should satisfy the Hungarian revisionism with one step further. At the same time, he still needed the military and economic aid in the coming campaign. Germany resolved the territorial dispute in such a way to ensure that both sides would carry out German wishes. The ‘Award’ gave Hungary enough territory to make the country indebted to Germany, and did not strip Romania of all the vital territories. The German arbitration tied Hungary to Germany; three months after the territorial settlement of Transylvania, Hungary adhered to the Tripartite Pact.⁸⁸ Along with Hungary, the signatories included Slovakia and Romania. The underlying reason for joining the Pact both for Hungary and Romania was to take a share in the future territorial gains the Axis powers were to achieve. Yet again, Hungary was lured in by its passionate revisionism. Hungary also granted the German troops in disguise free passage to Romania for Hitler to either attack Greece or the approaching but the furtive invasion of the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ Moreover the price of the ‘Award’ came in the handing over of the Hungarian Germans to the *Volksbund*.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ciano, August 30, 1940, 289.

⁸⁸ Eva S. Balogh, “Peaceful Revision: the Diplomatic Road to War,” *Hungarian Studies Review* X, no. 1 (Spring 1983):50. The Tripartite Pact was a defensive military agreement of alliance, initially signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on September 27, 1940.

⁸⁹ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 67.

⁹⁰ The *Volksbund der deutschen Ungarn* was a representative body of the German minority in Hungary, and was formed under the premiership of Imrédy. Now it became the sole legal organization to represent

In 1940, Teleki also tried to establish a Hungarian government-in-exile in the US and already sent five million dollars to Janos Pelenyi, the Hungarian minister in Washington.⁹¹ The reason for such a move was the fear of a German invasion of Hungary; in such an event, Hungarian political figures wanted to deprive Germany of any legitimate representative in Hungary, transferring all the representation to the previously-founded government in the US. Another measure was the placement of a prominent Hungarian political figure that would be permanently stationed in the West if the Hungarian government could not flee at the moment of invasion. Tibor Eckhardt, a former leader of the Smallholders' Party was chosen for this task.⁹² The relatively peaceful German policies toward Hungary caused the Hungarian government to abandon these plans. The year 1940, therefore, drove Hungary to completely abandon the dual and balanced policies it pursued between Germany and Italy. Germany dominated the Hungarian politics and revisionist dreams.

and grant special rights to the German minority both in Hungary and northern Transylvania. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 132.

⁹¹ In the end, the amount was sent back to Budapest. Frank, "Treaty revision and doublespeak," 164-165.

⁹² What is lesser known is the idea to form a government-in-exile in Canada. The reasoning behind such a consideration was that the country would be ideal since Canada never had had any diplomatic relations with Hungary unlike the US. For a thorough explanation of this Canadian affair with new documents see Nándor F. Dreisziger et al., "Mission Impossible: Secret Plans for a Hungarian Government-in-Exile in Canada during World War II," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 30, no. 2 (June 1988).

CHAPTER IV

HUNGARIAN COMBAT ACTIVITIES IN THE WAR (1941-1944)

4.1. The Beginning of the Hungarian Military Involvement

Although Hungary went to all-out war when it joined the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Hungary's entrance into war had begun with its involvement in Czechoslovak and later Yugoslav invasions. Hungary had no revisionist claims against the "Soviet Union. It aspired to restore the pre-First World War borders and maintain neutral political relations with Germany and the western powers, particularly Great Britain. The relations with the Soviet Union had never been on the forefront, as Hungary fulfilled the German military and political demands, the Hungarian government followed suit because of its revisionist policies and out of fear that the territories it had gained back with the help of Germany, would be in peril if it had not done so. Joining the war against the Soviet Union was the price for the irredentist gains, which Hungary had without resorting to arms.

In March 1941, the Yugoslavian government was overthrown by forces unfriendly to Germany. In order to secure Germany's Balkan flank for the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler felt compelled to launch an attack against Yugoslavia. Two days before the coup, the Yugoslav Government had joined the Tripartite Pact.⁹³

For the invasion, Hitler asked for Hungarian co-operation as well as active participation. Although Germany had the support of almost all the countries on the Yugoslav periphery –Italy, Romania, and Bulgaria –it demanded the passage of German troops through Hungarian territory to ensure a swift victory.⁹⁴ In return, he promised Horthy the returning of the lost Hungarian territories from Yugoslavia. Teleki believed that in order to maintain Hungarian neutrality and the Hungarian reputation in the West, the policies toward Germany should be limited, and definitely not at the cost of friendly relations with Yugoslavia.⁹⁵ The German invasion commenced on April 6. Three days before the invasion, Hungary's Premier, Count Pál Teleki committed suicide.⁹⁶ It was a protest against the approval of Germany's using the Hungarian territory as a passage into Yugoslavia, with which Hungary signed a pact of eternal friendship not long ago;⁹⁷ and

⁹³ In November 1940, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia joined the Tripartite Pact; a year later Bulgaria was part of it. The Bulgarian diplomatic reasoning ran that if they sided with the Germans, Germany would be a bridgehead against Greece; and also, Russia's claim that Bulgaria was in its "sphere of influence" would be defied. After Bulgaria's inclusion, the only country left out was Yugoslavia.

⁹⁴ Borsody, *Triumph of Tyranny*, 126.

⁹⁵ Nándor F. Dreisziger, "The Hungarian General Staff and Diplomacy, 1939-1941," *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* VII, no. 1 (Spring 1980):15.

⁹⁶ Churchill referred to Teleki's suicide as a "sacrifice to absolve himself and his people from guilt in the German attack upon Yugoslavia," and thought that this act cleared Teleki's name before history. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), 148.

⁹⁷ The treaty was dated December 12, 1940.

with his suicide, Teleki also recognized and showed that the cautious and obstinate Hungarian policy toward Germany had ended.

Horthy justified the Hungarian participation with a message that the Croats declared their independence and the government Hungary signed a friendship pact with a state that had ceased to exist with the recent coup. The Hungarian participation was not active as the Hungarian forces only supported the German troops on the flanks at Temesvár, Gyékény, and Barcs.⁹⁸ Hungary occupied Bácska, which was taken from the Kingdom with the Treaty of Trianon twenty-one years earlier. What the Hungarians feared and what the outside observers expected if Hungary had declined the military help to Germany, was the occupation of Hungary itself. Four days before the invasion, London cautioned Budapest not to take any military action against Yugoslavia or else Hungary might expect a British declaration of war on Hungary.⁹⁹ Horthy recounted the ambiguity of the British policies toward Hungary in this particular Yugoslav case and the Hungarian responsibility to revise their territories, which Trianon stripped off them.¹⁰⁰ With the invasion of Yugoslavia, Hungary occupied Vojvodina –its fourth border revision and territorial gain that concretized that Hungary was in the German camp (See Figure 4). This completely annihilated the ‘armed neutrality policy’ that Teleki endorsed during his administration.

A day after the invasion, Great Britain announced the departure from its policy of appeasement, giving guarantees to three East European countries, Poland, Romania, and

⁹⁸ Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary 1929-1945* Volume II (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956), 8.

⁹⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 148. However, Britain did not immediately declare war on Hungary. It would do so on December 5, 1941 when Hungary along with Romania and Finland signed the Tripartite Act.

¹⁰⁰ Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe*, 69.

Greece as well as a cessation of diplomatic relations with Hungary. The British policy toward Hungary was established as unchangeable and Britain was never to offer sympathy or consideration as long as Hungary supported the Axis.¹⁰¹ In his speech to Parliament on September 5, 1940, five days after Hungary was given northern Transylvania, Churchill stated that he had been “never happy in the way Hungary was treated after the last war”. But he also added that Britain would never recognize such a territorial change for the reason that it was not carried out with free consent of the people of Transylvania.¹⁰²

Lászlo Bárdossy replaced Teleki as prime minister. An anti-Bolshevik diplomat, Bárdossy would prove to be the man whose name would be identified with the disastrous Hungarian involvement with the Operation Barbarossa. His loyal policies toward Germany put Hungary into an actual battle. Within the same year, in December, Bárdossy declared war on the United States.¹⁰³ His motive was blind obedience to the German foreign policies.¹⁰⁴ Hungary had acquired its lost territories with the help of Germany and Italy, and in order to protect those gains, Bárdossy believed that staying in a steady course with Germany was vital and that Germany would come out of the war victorious. In his post-war trial, Bárdossy would reason that the Hungarian partial

¹⁰¹ András D. Ban, “British Foreign Policy towards East Central Europe and Hungary, 1939-1947,” in *20th Century Hungary and Great Powers*, ed. Ignác Romsics (New Jersey: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1995), 173.

¹⁰² Winston S. Churchill, September 5, 1940. *War Situation*. Commons Sitting.

¹⁰³ The Minister in Hungary (Pell) to the Secretary of State, December 13, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), Vol. I, 1941, the Soviet Union, doc. 591. This was two days after the official German declaration of war on the United States.

¹⁰⁴ When Slovakia, a country that the United States did not give any official recognition of existence, announced its declaration war on the US, the President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a memorandum to the State Department, saying that Hungary and other Axis countries might follow suit but since these were puppet regimes, the US Government should not pay attention to these declarations of war on their own country. Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State and the Undersecretary of State (Welles), December 12, 1941, *FRUS*, Vol II, 1942, Europe, doc. 819. The US declared war on Hungary, and on Bulgaria and Romania on June 5, 1942.

fulfillment of German demands would hold off greater and more demanding German requests it would present to Hungary as an allied partner.¹⁰⁵ History proved the opposite: the less Hungary gave, the more Germany became weary of its ostensibly pro-Axis policies, and more it demanded of Hungary both in military and economic spheres.

In the war Germany was about to wage on the Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler counted on the involvement of Romania from the very beginning.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to seeking Romanian participation, Hitler did not initially expect or demand Hungarian military support in the operation. In a meeting with Hitler on December 5, 1940, Halder noted that “there is no doubt that Romania, as well as Finland, are going on an East German campaign with Germany.”¹⁰⁷ There was no mention of Hungary. On the Hungarian side, too, there was no territorial or political claims directed against the Soviet Union. Hitler’s indifference in Hungarian participation was also the cumulative result of Hungary’s stance during the German occupation of Sudetenland and Poland.¹⁰⁸ Hungary was notified of Operation

¹⁰⁵ Pál Pritz, “War-Crimes Trial Hungarian Style: Prime Minister László Bárdossy Before the People’s Tribunal, 1945,” *Hungarian Studies Review* XXII, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 60.

¹⁰⁶ Romania’s grudge against the Soviets dated back to when Romania lost Bessarabia. After Germany occupied France in 1940, the Soviet Union began to demand the territories promised under the secret terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact a year before. On June 26, 1940 Romania received a Soviet ultimatum regarding the return of Bessarabia as well as northern part of Bukovina. Romania officially yielded those territories and those were annexed to the Moldavian SSR and the areas where the Slavs formed a majority were given to the Ukrainian SSR. This loss was also part of the German responsibility as part of the Pact. However, Romania was not able to politically resent the decision. The loss of Romanian territories was followed two months later by the “Second Vienna Award.” The country entered the war together with the German forces on June 22, 1941, and by the time the war became more intense in 1942, Romania had committed about 26 divisions for the Operation Barbarossa –the largest Axis contribution for the Wehrmacht. Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 182. At the Peace Conference in 1946, Romania was careful not to demand those territories back. The ceded Bessarabia and Bukovina by Romania remained part of the Moldavian SSR out of Romanian fear of the Soviet Union. John C. Campbell, “The European Territorial Settlement,” *Foreign Affairs* 26, no.1 (October 1947), 209.

¹⁰⁷ *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (KTB) December 5, 1940, Band I, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1965), 204. Indeed Finland joined Operation Barbarossa on June 26.

¹⁰⁸ In 1939, Hungary refused to cooperate with Germany by not granting them a passage to Poland through Hungary for the invasion of Poland; and even opened the northeastern borders to the Poles in flight.

Barbarossa through an official letter by Hitler to Horthy on the day of the invasion just as the other participating states, excluding Romania whose participation in the war, was a “matter of life” for Germany.¹⁰⁹ The Hungarian government, nevertheless, granted the Germans passage through Hungarian lands. Horthy claims that he received a hand-written note from Hitler immediately after Operation Barbarossa began, which demanded Hungary declare war on the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰ The Hungarian wishful-thinking at the time was that a victorious but exhausted Germany would fall prey to Great Britain after the war.¹¹¹

4.2. The Bombing of Kassa

On June 26, 1941, four days after the launching of Operation Barbarossa, Kassa and Munkács¹¹² were bombed by unidentified aircraft. The then-Prime Minister Bárdossy stated that it was the Soviet Union.¹¹³ The following day Hungary officially declared

¹⁰⁹“... ausgenommen Rumänien, für das die Beteiligung an der Operation eine Lebensfrage sei.” 1941, *KTB*, February 3, 1941, Band I, 299.

¹¹⁰ Horthy, *Memoirs*, 189.

¹¹¹ The Minister in Hungary (Pell) to the Secretary of State, June 23, 1941, *FRUS*, Vol. I, 1941, the Soviet Union, doc. 337.

¹¹² Restored to Hungary with the First Vienna Award.

¹¹³ The most popular conviction is that the perpetrators were the Germans and they bombed the towns so as to draw Hungary into the war against the Soviet Union. Another theory is that it was the Russians, but this theory begs the questions whether the Soviet Air Force was capable of penetrating the Carpathian Basin at the time, and whether the Soviet Union had a reasonable motive in doing so. There is also the implausible allegation that it was a Czech or a Slovak aircraft. For more on this third theory, see C.A. Macartney, “Hungary’s Declaration of War on the USSR in 1941,” *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography*, 1961. For the other possible explanations in a wider context, see Nándor.F. Dreisziger, “New Twist to An Old Riddle: The Bombing of Kassa (Kosice), June 26, 1941,” *The Journal of Modern History* 44, no. 2, (June 1972):232-242.

war on the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴ It was a hasty decision, which is still debated to date.¹¹⁵ It much later surfaced, however, that the Soviet Foreign Commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov had informed Bárdossy on June 23 that it was his hope to maintain friendly relations with Hungary.¹¹⁶ Hungary's change of feat in such a sharp foreign policy, abandoning the policy of neutrality altogether, could be due to its calculations that cooperation with Germany was called for in order to maintain the irredentist claims it had since the Treaty of Trianon, which aroused romantic hopes as to take back the lost Hungarian territories with the German help.¹¹⁷ In May, the chief of the Hungarian General Staff, Colonel-General von Szombathelyi opposed joining Germany against the Soviet Union, for Hungary would not be able to properly supply the army. Moreover, the German military and technical support was reported to be inadequate and expensive by the Hungarian Technical Military Committee.¹¹⁸

For one thing, the decision of declaration of war was decisive as it conclusively turned Hungary from a state at peace into a belligerent power. This was a commitment out of which Hungary was hard-pressed to extricate itself, for its geographical position and

¹¹⁴ The Minister in Hungary (Pell) to the Secretary of State, June 27, 1941, *FRUS*, 1941, Vol. I, The Soviet Union, doc. 340.

¹¹⁵ Dreisziger paints a general picture in the eve of the Operation Barbarossa as if Hungary had to join because the other Axis countries –Romania and Slovakia –joined the war one by one and Hungarian military neutralism would cost them dearly. Nándor. F. Dreisziger, “The Hungarian General Staff and Diplomacy, 1939-1941,” *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* VII, no.1 (Spring 1980), 19. This view oversimplifies the machinations that the Hitler regime and its political influence spread over the other Axis countries, including Italy, as well as the Führer's decision to the last minute not to include Hungary in Operation Barbarossa and only use the Hungarian soil for the deployment of German troops. For that last detail see *KTB*, March 18, 1941, 361.

¹¹⁶ Mario Fenyő, “The Allied Axis Armies at Stalingrad,” *Military Affairs* 59, no. 2 (Summer 1965), 58. Fenyő is of the opinion that the possibility of the aircraft belonging to Germany is stronger. Yet, there are not enough clues to support either of those hypotheses.

¹¹⁷ Balvanyi argues it was the power of affairs as opposed to the general claim that it was “professional officers” that had drawn Hungary into the war. But yet again, he was of the officer corps. Andreas von Balvanyi, “Der Untergang der 2. ungarischen Armee am Don 1943,” *ASMZ : Sicherheit Schweiz : Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitschrift* 126 (1960), 1052.

¹¹⁸ Balvanyi, “Der Untergang der 2. Ungarischen Armee,” 1052.

economic opportunities it presented to its ally, Germany, were indispensable once it joined in the struggle. Furthermore, the decision had been established on the ideological grounds, too; joining the crusade against Bolshevik Russia. This motive would force to propel the Soviet Union to retort likewise for that it threatened the very core of their state—an ideological background, which was to be used as a legitimate weapon for the wholesale invasion of Hungary by the Soviet troops later in 1944.

In addition, as early as 1939, Hungary's motives were fluctuating. It sought to make a pact of alliance with Germany in order to avoid a German invasion or a "friendly occupation."¹¹⁹ Yet, the political motive centered on the Hungarian irredentism as Horthy claimed 95 percent of the Hungarian people detested Germany.¹²⁰ The extent of this cooperation was determined by the Regent Horthy's anti-bolshevism that was shared by many in Hungary, as well.¹²¹ Those included the army officer corps, whose anti-socialism and anti-Semitism were fuelled by the dismemberment of Hungarian territories following the Great War, as well as the economic wreck it created.¹²²

Germany asked for 23 Hungarian divisions. Ten out of previously promised fifteen were in the first phase of Operation Barbarossa.¹²³ Of these, nine were "light divisions".¹²⁴ Thus, the total number of the first line of Hungarian troops sent to the front was about 200,000. The Carpathian Group was under the command of Lieutenant General Ferenc

¹¹⁹ Ciano, August 18, 1939, 123.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Hungary was the last country to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union in 1934, one year after the USA had. BCA, 1934: 30 10 /232-567-9

¹²² In 1919, the town of Széged became the hub of radical right wing groups who embarked on the organization of a Hungarian National Army to overthrow Béla Kun's communist government. Sakmyster, "István Bethlen and Hungarian Foreign Policy," 20.

¹²³ Fenyő, "Allied Axis Armies," 59.

¹²⁴ Brigades were re-named as light divisions; those 9 divisions were equivalent of 6 German divisions. C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History Volume II*, 67.

Szombathelyi. Hitler requested that the Rapid Corps of the Carpathian Group be placed under the supervision of Army Group South. In the beginning, Hungary did not commit much military support and, indeed, this was certainly not what Hitler desired. However, at the end of 1941, with the Soviet counteroffensive, the *Wehrmacht* lost most of the territories it took on its drive to Moscow. In this dire situation, Hitler asked for more Hungarian support in a letter to Horthy. As the Chief of the General Staff, Szombathelyi commented, the Germans turned the “voluntary participation into an obligation.”¹²⁵

During his visit to Budapest, the German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, voiced a coveted threat that if Hungary did not act in compliance with the German wishes, the Hungarian territorial gains would be reversed. Both Horthy and Bárdossy wanted to maintain friendly relations with Germany but commit as little as possible to the *Drang nach Osten*. After all, the Hungarian economy was weak, its army without technological equipment, and the Romanian threat on the border always present.

Through the end of 1941, most Hungarian divisions were called back from the front. Only the Hungarian occupation forces were in the Soviet Union and were under the direct control of German operational command.¹²⁶ However, in the winter of 1941-42 Germany put more emphasis and pressure on the need of more divisions as the fighting took on a more severe form in the eastern front. General Field Marshal, Wilhelm von Keitel arrived in Hungary on January 20, 1942, to help strengthen the belief that the war could indeed be won.¹²⁷ In order to give more weight to his demands, General Keitel

¹²⁵ Szombathelyi quoted in Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 184.

¹²⁶ Sándor Szakály, “Hungarian-German Military Cooperation during World War II,” in *20th Century Hungary and Great Powers*, ed. Ignác Romsics (New Jersey: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1995), 150.

¹²⁷ Balvanyi reasons that although the Germans were confident of a victory against the Soviet Union, Germany did not possess the air dominance. Balvanyi, “Der Untergang der 2. Ungarischen Armee,” 1052.

referred to the "Viennese Decisions," which had not been made "in order that Hungary now acts with conditions and demands." In spite of exhaustive orientation, the General-Marshal then demanded, besides the seven occupying divisions, an operational army of nine divisions and one Panzer Division, i.e. a total of seventeen divisions, be provided by Hungary, 207,000 troops in total.¹²⁸ Horthy was inclined to give in but still did not relent to order a general mobilization in Hungary. Total Hungarian support for Germany in the war was out of the question. Even the regent himself was exasperated with the Germans.¹²⁹

4.3. The Massacre of Novi Sad

While the Hungarian government was in negotiations with Germany for military support, the Hungarian military and gendarmerie carried out a slaughter in the city of Novi Sad¹³⁰ in Vojvodina, which was the Yugoslav territory Hungary had occupied after the invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941. In the region of Bácska, they killed about 3,300 civilians, who were mostly Serbs and Jews; two-thirds of these killings were in Novi Sad.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 1053.

¹²⁹ Ciano, January 15, 1942, 436.

¹³⁰ The Hungarian name was Ujvidek. In the history of Hungary, Vojvodina, consisting of Baranya, Bacsa, and Banat, was not a territory the Hungarians attached a particular national significance as they did in the case of Felvidek or Transylvania. It was an agricultural area with a mixed population. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 187.

After the German invasion, the partisan movement in Yugoslavia started to grow; the attacks were not only on the German-occupied Serb territories but also on the areas where Hungary invaded. In January, the partisans from Bánát infiltrated and killed some Hungarian gendarmes in the area of Sajkas. The Hungarian authorities took the issue in their hands, sending military support to the gendarmerie in the Serb territories. Soon, the purges were carried deep into the city of Novi Sad where the Hungarian military authorities claimed the partisans pulled back. On January 21, 6,000 to 7,000 people were taken into custody; many were shot on the banks of Danube.¹³¹ The Hungarian military authorities wanted to display to the Germans the Hungarian power of handling local resistance and Jewish ‘sabotage’ on the home front. This was a move to control the entire Banat region and a proof that they needed the Hungarian Army back at the Hungarian borders, too.

Soon, the news of the massacre spread out; however, the Hungarian authorities with Horthy and Bardossy in charge, carried out a small investigation in Novi Sad. The Hungarian press tried to minimize the magnitude of the massacre. Bardossy thought of resignation but in the coming spring, the Hungarian Second Army would be sent off to the Russian front under growing German pressure. In 1944, Yugoslav partisans would drive out Hungarian and German troops, killing thousands of civilians, not only of Hungarian and German origin but those whom they deemed to be “collaborators” as

¹³¹Ibid., 188.

well.¹³² The mass killings of Tito's partisan armies were "justified" as retaliation against what the Hungarian military did two years ago.

Two months after the Novi Sad Massacre, Bárdossy was replaced by Miklós Kállay. However, the position for the minister of foreign affairs was not included when the cabinet was announced. The German primary concern lay there; the Germans encouraged the re-appointment of Bárdossy to that post, but it never succeeded. It could be the lack of leverage on Ribbentrop's part.¹³³ Kállay took the position of minister of foreign affairs himself on May 22 as a temporary post. He interpreted the nine months of the German invasion of the Soviet Union as bound to failure. However, he did not openly pursue an anti-German policy. His was a so-called *hintapolitika*, policy of the swing, comprising both right and left so as to "extricate Hungary from the German orbit."¹³⁴ Kállay was known to be so anti-German that the US perceived his appointment to be a sharp turn in Hungarian politics from the complete German dominance.¹³⁵ He kept assuring the German side that Hungary was loyal to the German cause in the Soviet Union but his efforts to pull his country out of the war accelerated.

¹³² Although the Hungarian massacre of Novi Sad was known, the Yugoslav atrocities in 1944-45 were kept under wraps both in Yugoslavia and Hungary until the fall of the Soviet Union. And, in 1946, the commanding Hungarian officers of the massacre along with the local representatives were executed in and around Novi Sad. Árpád von Klimó, "1956 and the Collapse of Stalinist Politics of History: Forgetting and Remembering the 1942 Újvidék/Novi Sad Massacre and the 1944/45 Partisan Retaliations in Hungary and Yugoslavia (1950s-1960s)," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no.4 (2016):740-42.

¹³³ For more on this speculation see, Mario Fenyő, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary: German-Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 62-63.

¹³⁴ Fenyő, *Horthy, Hitler, and Hungary*, 65.

¹³⁵ Memorandum by the Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs (Atherton) to the Acting Secretary of State, March 17, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, Vol. II, Europe, doc. 824. Horthy also got his son, István Horthy elected as vice-regent in the same year. Shortly after his election, István Horthy went to the Eastern front as a Lieutenant in the Hungarian Air Force. He died in a plane crash on August 20. István Horthy was known to be sympathetic toward the British, which greatly disturbed Berlin. Rita Péntek, "István Horthy's Election as Vice-Regent in 1942," *Hungarian Studies Review* XXIII, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), 25.

4.4. Defeat on the Don

The mobilization of the Hungarian Second Army bound for the eastern front began in February; it was under the command of General Gusztáv Jány. The role the Second Army was to play in Operation *Blau* was to be deployed on the lower Volga with the Romanian and Italian elements under Army Group South, who would make a dash toward Stalingrad and the oil fields in the Caucasus region. Both Horthy and Kállay had faith in the German victory in the eve of defeat: Germany had its rule over Poland, Holland, Belgium, France, Denmark, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Greece, with Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, and Finland in part on the Axis camp.¹³⁶

At the beginning of February 1942, the Operations Division of OKH¹³⁷ concentrated on the objective of the seizure of the Caucasus. This sector received the priority in replacement troops and equipment. The Axis divisions of Hungary, Romania, and Italy had fewer weapons and advanced equipment than their German counterparts.¹³⁸ As a result, the allied armies had been relegated secondary roles such as securing the flanks and mopping-up operations. The continuous victories led Hitler to divide his army in half; he sent General Ewald von Kleist with Army Group A to the Caucasus and General Maximilian von Weichs with Army Group B to the east across the Don. The strategic importance of Stalingrad was such that the German forces would secure the isolation of

¹³⁶ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 200.

¹³⁷ Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the German Army)

¹³⁸ Only one Italian division was considered on par with an average German formation. David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 108.

the Soviet armies in the Caucasus if it were to prove successful; and that the rest of the Soviet armies would also be in danger of encirclement. Cutting off of the oil reserves both in the Caucasus and the Caspian basin would deem the Allied help through the north –especially, by Arkhangelsk –futile as the southern oil kept the Soviet power going. However, the tactical siege by the Germans made the Germans themselves vulnerable as they were trained and excelled in mobile warfare as opposed to the staticness of the siege. The Soviet army made use of that vulnerability; the German position was what molded the Russian plan of a counter-offensive at Stalingrad.¹³⁹

Coupled with the tactical siege, the unprotected flanks of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad was another fatal German mistake. The northern flank was held by the Romanian Third Army, the northwestern flank by the Italian Eighth Army and to the northwestern of the Italian army was the Hungarian Second Army.¹⁴⁰ Those armies had severe supply problems, especially lacking the antitank weapons. On top of that, the German forces were unable to supply the allied armies, for the front had already extended several thousand kilometers. The Hungarian Second Army was placed in defense of a 200-km wide sector between Voronezh and Pavloszk on the Don with only 18 infantry regiments to cover the front.¹⁴¹

For the current situation of the Axis armies, the lack of reserves behind was a major problem.¹⁴² The Soviet counteroffensive on November 19, 1942, was directed against the two Romanian armies on the flanks of the Sixth Army, as the Soviet High Command

¹³⁹ Fenyő, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary*, 101.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 208.

¹⁴² 3 or 4 German divisions had been incorporated into the other Axis armies, and more –including the Forty-Eighth Armored Corps made up of the reserve forces. Fenyő, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary*, 101.

was in full knowledge of the fact that those were the inferior forces in the German periphery. Two days later, those two Romanian divisions were completely overrun and the *Kesselschlacht* –the very tactic the Germans excelled in employing –was nearly completed around the Sixth Army (See Figure 6). In December, placed under the command of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Army Group Don was created solely for the tasks of taking back territories lost after the Soviet counteroffensive, and of re-establishing contact with the now-trapped Sixth Army. Through late December, the latter task was almost achieved as the Fourth Armored Army came within approximately 25 kilometers of the Sixth Army. On the other hand, the Italian Eighth Army had been annihilated. The communication lines of Army Group Don, as well as of Army Group A, and the city of Rostov were under Soviet threat. Thus, the German relief effort for the Sixth Army was forced to be sidelined in favor of evacuation of the Caucasus region.¹⁴³ In January 1943, the Hungarian Second Army, and the rest of the Italian forces were overrun on the Don. Why did the Hungarian soldier fight in the Soviet Union? The lack of a tangible and sensible answer to this question and the diminishing German drive led to the lack of Hungarian military morale on the fighting ground.

The Soviet January offensive managed to catch the Axis forces by surprise; even though, the prior devastation of both Italian and Romanian armies by the almost identical tactics had been observed by the Hungarian military authorities. Even more, the Soviet attacks against the Italian and Hungarian sectors were predicted since November 1942. On Christmas, the Regent Horthy raised the issue of poorly-supplied Hungarian troops in a response to a letter, where Hitler asked for rigid Hungarian resistance against the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 102.

Soviets.¹⁴⁴ Another issue for the Hungarian Army on the Don was the overstretched front, as well as the lack of reserves behind. On December 27, Hitler ordered all possible measures to support and supply the Hungarian Second Army. Yet, the order was slow to be carried out. In January, the Hungarians still lacked large-caliber anti-tank weapons. Following the collapse of the Hungarian Second Army, Gusztav Jány issued an order on January 24, 1943, which stated that the Hungarian Army lost its honor for it could not accomplish what it set out to do.¹⁴⁵ Before Operation Barbarossa, Adolf Hitler regarded Hungary as a military force to be reckoned with. However, after the poor Hungarian performance on the Don, his ranking of the Axis armies went as followed: “Romanians first, Italians second, and Hungarians last.”¹⁴⁶

The German Sixth Army under von Paulus was encircled at Stalingrad on the lower Don the Romanian and the 8th Italian armies were smashed.¹⁴⁷ The allegedly poor performance of the Hungarians was not entirely grounded. Earlier, General Jány asked for the Cramer Group, the German reserve assigned to the Hungarian rear, to back up. However, Hitler’s order for it rather came late –so late that the Hungarian lines had entirely been penetrated by the time the order became effective. These two crucial points –lack of reserves and of military supply –brought about the collapse of the Hungarian Second Army on a more swift and grand scale. With factual, quiet consideration one would have said, to evade the Russian attack on the Don, it would stand to reason to return in prepared retreat on the shortest, strongly fortifying line - for instance, the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945*, entry for May 8, 1943. ed. by Ralf Georg Reuth (München: Piper Verlag, 2003), 1926.

¹⁴⁷ Only the Italian Alpini Corps remained with the Hungarian Second Army until it was threatened from its southern flank; then it marched off without waiting for further instructions. Balvanyi, “Der Untergang der 2. Ungarischen Armee,” 1056.

mouth of the Danube to the Baltic Sea near Königsberg - and to provide sustained resistance there in a shorter front with retreated troops. There was no other way to handle the desolate situation; least of all was the smashing of the Don, while the highest leadership was concerned with small-tactical interventions in the powers of sub-commanders.

The battle on Don was operationally futile. This also applies to the entire Eastern Front, as the Army Groups Center and North (backlash near Leningrad) have succumbed to a similar fate as Army Group South soon afterwards. Without strong timely curtailment of the front and the supply lines, the *Ostheer* could not be helped. The Hungarian government and the military wanted to pull the remaining forces of the Second Army back home in February; the German permission to do so was never given, and instead, Hitler demanded the Hungarian remnants to be formed into an army corps to assist the occupation forces and asked for even more Hungarian divisions.¹⁴⁸ Horthy did not relent to the demand. The disaster on the Don accelerated the Kállay government's political alienation with National Socialism. Germany had already altered its tone regarding the war; "*Krieg ist schon gewonnen*" had now become "We cannot lose this war."¹⁴⁹ Hungary's efforts to contact the Allies for a possible negotiation also increased.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 230.

¹⁴⁹ Ciano, August 27, 1942, 517.

¹⁵⁰ The losses of the 2nd Hungarian Army, with 150,000 men in 9 divisions, are exceptionally high, especially when compared with those of the k. und k. In 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Army suffered in Italy during the ten-day unsuccessful June offensive when it lost 142,500 men from 47 divisions (716 battalions and 6,830 guns), which was described as "unusually high" in history, Balvanyi, "Der Untergang der 2. Ungarischen Armee," 1061. The Second Army also lost 80 percent of its equipment. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 225.

4.5. Hungarian Doubts and Allied Contacts

With the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942, these developments gradually strengthened the Hungarian doubts as to the ultimate German victory. Military realities steered the course of political considerations from the battle of Stalingrad onwards. The Allied presence in North Africa was succeeded by the invasion of mainland Europe from the south. The Allies landed on Sicily in July 1943, then on Italy itself in September. Mussolini was overthrown. This was followed by the German occupation of northern Italy where they reinstated Mussolini as head of a German puppet government. The *Festung Europa* was coming apart at the seams. The *Wehrmacht*, along with its allied foreign armies, were facing looming disaster in the face. From then on, Hungary tried to establish and maintain contacts with the British Foreign Office and the US State Department. The main focus of these contacts was the condition of the maintenance of the Hungarian territories after the war. Indeed, Bulgaria and Romania were trying to make the same attempt with the same condition.¹⁵¹ What the Allies pointed out, again and again, was that they would not conduct negotiations without the Soviet representatives present, for separate discussions would undermine the joint Allied efforts. Various Hungarian attempts of all political spectrums to contact the Western Allies were made through Switzerland, Turkey, and even through the Archduke

¹⁵¹ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Turkey (Steinhardt), March 13, 1943, *FRUS*, vol. I, General, doc. 491.

Otto Habsburg, in a vain attempt to extend the so-called joint wish of Austria and Hungary to restore the monarchy.¹⁵²

The British saw Hungary as the only satellite country that managed to preserve its independence in South-Eastern Europe. The opposition, made up of the Christian Popular Party, Social Democratic Party, and Small Farmers' Party, had concluded an anti-Nazi coalition in 1943 which called for complete withdrawal from the Axis and asked for a pro-Allied foreign and military policy.¹⁵³ In April 1943, Barcza, the former Hungarian minister in London, traveled to Switzerland for negotiations for peace and for establishing Anglo-American contacts. His focus was the Hungarian withdrawal from the war. And, it was through the British trust that Barcza was received as a partner at the talks. The Hungarian government saw a complete withdrawal from the war as the only logical way out for Hungary.¹⁵⁴ This visit, however, did not result in anything concrete for the Hungarian side as the British strengthened its alliance with the Soviet Union. There was breeding antagonism toward Hungary; Stalin demanded that "Hungary be punished."¹⁵⁵ "Unconditional surrender" voiced at Casablanca in 1943 was not desirable for Hungary, but the Kállay government was even ready to accept it if the take-over of the country was solely to be carried by the western Allied forces. In late 1944, in an undated memorandum by the Office of the Strategic Services (OSS), Hungary's

¹⁵² In 1920 Horthy asked the remaining members of the Habsburg dynasty in Hungary to leave the country.

Otto Habsburg was not a strong political figure by any means, and his efforts did not succeed in the United States. Judith Fai-Podipnik, "Feuding Hungarians in the West: Troubles with the Struggle Against Communist Ascendancy in Hungary, 1945-1956," *International Social Science Review* 82, No.1 (2007), 10.

¹⁵³ Memorandum by Archduke of Austria to Major General Clayton Bissell, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, United States Army. undated, *FRUS*, The British Commonwealth and Europe, vol III, doc. 783.

¹⁵⁴ Ban, "British Foreign Policy," 179.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony Eden in Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), March 16, 1943, *FRUS*, The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East, vol. III, doc. 15.

quandary as to whether resisting Germany would result in the halt of the Soviet invasion at the Carpathian Mountains, the Hungarian preference lay in an Anglo-American invasion.¹⁵⁶

By November 1943, the Hungarian ground forces amounted to thirty-seven combat divisions –the largest after the 315 German divisions, though, they were not actively used for frontline service.¹⁵⁷ The German military strength was deteriorating daily; the enlistment of non-Germans contributed to that decline in the division-strength. As early as 1943, the US Military had predicted that although Germany was on the decline in the battlefield, they would fight to keep both Romania and Hungary on its side as long as possible, due to the oil in both countries, in addition to the Hungarian lines of communication. Moreover, the estimate was that Hitler would occupy any of the Axis countries –Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria –solely to counteract a possible defection from any of them.¹⁵⁸ From then on, in the eyes of the Allies, Hitler’s primary objective was not the invasion of the Soviet Union, but the defense of *Festung Europa*.¹⁵⁹ Germany had in its control all of the continental Europe west of the USSR, excluding the Allied-occupied parts of Italy and neutral countries.¹⁶⁰ The control of the Mediterranean through Crete and Rhodes as well as of the Baltic and Aegean Seas were

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum by the Office of Strategic Services, 1944, *FRUS*, Vol. III, 864.01/1-3144. Handed to Fletcher Warren, of the Office of Assistant Secretary of State Berle, on January 31 by Whitney Shepardson, of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). On February 8 Mr. Warren telephoned in reply, giving the position stated by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Dunn), approved by Mr. Berle, that “We don’t deal with any of these overtures except on the basis of unconditional surrender.” Also see Winston S. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 131.

¹⁵⁷ Only 258 German, and 7 depleted Romanian divisions in the Crimea were counted for the frontlines. Memorandum by the United States Chief of Staff, November 18, 1943, *FRUS*, J.C.S. Files, doc. 229.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ The term meant an essential core of Germany, most of Poland, Hungary, and Romania; and with other auxiliary areas on its periphery.

¹⁶⁰ Those were Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Sweden.

part of that German control. Thus, Germany still had a self-sufficient military control in Europe to a certain extent.

In retrospect, Hungary's entry into the war on June 26, 1941, had been the result of a culminating national tendency with its roots in the Treaty of Trianon. The rightist elements had been on the rise, but they were consistently checked by Hungarian liberal elements; every prime minister, Teleki, Kánya, and Bethlen that came into office tried to moderate this rising rightist influence but always adhering to the revisionist policies of Hungary. In the years leading up to the war, this particular political obsession was cleverly used and abused by Hitler, who also counted on the economically weak position of Hungary. In essence, what Hitler employed was the "carrot and stick policy" toward Hungary; rewarding them—the Vienna *diktats* were called "awards" on the Axis camp, after all—and threatening to take back those "rewards" if the country did not comply with the rules he set out. By June 26, Hungary was the only Axis country that did not enter the war against the Soviets.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Excluding Bulgaria, whose active participation could not be guaranteed by the German military. On February 8, 1941, Field Marshal Wilhelm List went to Sofia and signed a secret agreement with the Bulgarian military; the deal stated that Bulgaria would provide transport facilities for the *Wehrmacht*, while the country guarded its frontiers against possible attacks by Turkey. Ernst L. Presseisen, "Prelude to 'Barbarossa': Germany and the Balkans, 1940-1941," *The Journal of Modern History* 32, no. 4 (December 1960), 366.

CHAPTER V

UNGARN – FEINDES LAND: THE GERMAN AND RUSSIAN OCCUPATIONS OF HUNGARY (MARCH 1944 –FEBRUARY 1945)

“Germany and its allies were in the same boat on a stormy sea. It was obvious that in that situation anyone wanting to get off would drown immediately.”- Hitler to Horthy,

April 1943¹⁶²

On September 3, 1943, the Italian government under Badoglio signed an armistice with the Allies, effective of September 8. Alarmed by the treachery by one of its closest allies, Hitler took measures to prevent a similar or same move by the other Axis countries. Within September, he ordered two separate plans to be drawn for the occupation of Hungary and Romania. Operation *Margarethe I* –the plan for the occupation of Hungary – was drafted by the German Army General Staff on September 30. The occupation of Romania (*Margarethe II*) was never implemented due to the trust Hitler had in Antonescu. In early 1944, Hitler, in his discussions with Antonescu,

¹⁶² Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945 Nemesis* (New York: W&W Norton and Company, 2000), 560.

demanded the Romanian participation in the military occupation of Hungary. But the Romanian leader demanded a guarantee of the immediate return of the areas awarded to Hungary by the Vienna arbitration back in 1940.¹⁶³ So this cooperation was stillborn as Hitler declined the Romanian demand. The Kállay government received intelligence regarding the imminent German operation; there were no measures taken and the demand for a German explanation for the troop movements was naturally met with denial.¹⁶⁴

5.1. Hungary under German Control

On March 18, 1944, Admiral Horthy was invited by Hitler to Schloss Klessheim, west of Salzburg. The agenda of the meeting comprised an ultimatum. Hitler asked for an explanation of the Hungarian government's secret dealings with the Allies to have a separate peace and told Horthy that if Hungary did not form a new and loyal government to Germany, and allow the *Wehrmacht* peacefully into the country, Hungary's territories would be threatened by its neighbors, especially, Romania.¹⁶⁵ Accompanied by SS Obergruppenführer Ernst Kaltenbrunner of the RSHA,¹⁶⁶ Horthy returned to Budapest as

¹⁶³ Lothar Gruchmann, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg: Kriegführung und Politik* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 261.

¹⁶⁴ György Ránki, "The German Occupation of Hungary," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 11, no.1 (1965), 265.

¹⁶⁵ Dreisziger, "Transylvania in International Power Politics," 100-101.

¹⁶⁶ Reichssicherheitshauptamt (The Reich Main Security Office)

an unofficial prisoner.¹⁶⁷ At the train station in Budapest, the German guards were to greet him. It was a peculiar scene to behold: the Germans, who were an ally hours ago, invaded Hungary. The Hungarian military was clueless as to what to do. The Chief of the General Staff, Szombathelyi, sent a telegram with instructions to receive the German occupiers without any resistance.¹⁶⁸ Hitler's other reason for the invasion was to solidify the hinterland of his Eastern Front, which was engulfed by the Red Army by that time.

Horthy was now at German behest. He gathered a meeting at the Royal Castle where the regent resided now virtually as a prisoner. Kállay tried to persuade Horthy to step down so that they could show the Allies that it was not a consented change in Hungary. Horthy refused the suggestion on the grounds that he was responsible to everyone and that if he left, the fate of the country and its citizens would be in greater danger.¹⁶⁹ Another advice given to Horthy was that he should not appoint a new government so that the Germans could not go into negotiations with any authority in Hungary. This would show that the legitimacy of the government was not drawn by the Germans. However, Horthy refused all these advice and suggestions. He had in mind that his resignation would mean a complete Nazi rule in Hungary. With Horthy as head of state, Germany would not be able to control the Hungarian Army or would they try to install a Nazi Arrow-Cross Party regime.¹⁷⁰

On March 19, the Gestapo carried out mass arrests, including the arrest of many members of Parliament and the possible leaders of the opposition. Kállay fled to the

¹⁶⁷ Anthony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 549.

¹⁶⁸ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 279.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁷⁰ Horthy, *Memoirs*, 215.

Turkish embassy where the Turkish minister Şevket Fuat Keçeci offered him refuge there as Turkey was a neutral country at that time.¹⁷¹ István Bethlen escaped to Transylvania under a disguise. In the meantime, Horthy was given three days to form a new government or else the *Wehrmacht* under Field Marshal von Weichs would occupy the castle where Horthy was staying. This ultimatum was less a real threat than cowing Hungary into submission. If Germany would topple Horthy itself, then a possibility of a Hungarian uprising would become very high, which would mean directing more German troops for what seemed to be an internal issue by now, instead of the Eastern Front. It was, therefore, imperative that it was Horthy who would consent and meet the deadline without the need for Germany to resort to a full-scale occupation.

The new government that was appointed on March 22 consisted of half the ministers before the German occupation. The new prime minister was Döme Sztójay, the former Hungarian minister in Berlin. What Horthy's approval for the new government meant for Germany was that it was a legitimate and constitutional government still under the Regent. From then on, Horthy lived a secluded life at the castle, not interfering in the government decisions. He believed it to be a sign of protest against German control. Here, the question of why Admiral Horthy had held onto the Regency and not step down comes to the forefront. If he had done so and would put up resistance against Germany, Hungary would meet tougher German invasion policies. On the other hand, what Horthy believed could be a possibility that the Allies would not hand over Hungary to the Soviets and at the end of the war, Hungary would have more of a say at the peace

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 283. Kállay stayed at the Turkish embassy for nearly 8 months. During that time the Embassy was pressured constantly by Germany to let Kállay out. As his personal decision, Kállay left the embassy premises on his own and this led to his immediate arrest. He was taken to Mathausen Concentration Camp first, and to Dachau later.

negotiations. Horthy's decision to keep his post led to Hungary's recognition of a German ally until the very end of the war. At the peace table too, Hungary was never perceived as an "occupied country." Hungary also considered and hoped for the possibility that Anglo-American forces would invade instead of the Red Army,¹⁷² which they fought against, therefore feared the repercussions on the Hungarian soil, of the not-so-old combat history they both shared. One of the German demands that were put before Horthy in the presence of Hitler was the canceling of all Hungarian military preparations on its border with Romania.¹⁷³ The curtailment of the Hungarian action in such an area could have been the triggering event for a possible Hungarian defection. Earlier, Hungary did not want to commit all of its military capabilities to the Operation Barbarossa, preferring to concentrate large numbers of Hungarian troops on the Romanian frontier as the country feared a possible attack from that direction at any given time. Now Hungary was left defenseless in the face of its paramount adversary, Horthy could opt for political inaction.

With the German political dominance in Hungary, the opposition parties were banned. However, the military could retain independence to a certain degree; it was to be subordinated to the *Wehrmacht* in the operations. Another measure Germany had taken was the mobilization of Hungarian troops. When Hungary joined the Operation Barbarossa, it never fully mobilized its army for the concern of the protection of Hungarian borders, especially against its neighbor, Romania. Now, Germany increased the pace of mobilization and took the decision to mass Hungarian troops in the

¹⁷² Ban, "British Foreign Policy," 178.

¹⁷³ Ránki, "The German Occupation of Hungary," 270.

Carpathian Front against the Red Army. The elite division of the Hungarian Army, the First Cavalry Division, was sent off to the front with four more divisions in June.¹⁷⁴

After July 1943 with the Allies on Sicily, and the Italian mainland being the next target, Churchill's Mediterranean plans spanned much more, even with Austria and Hungary as the ultimate goals.¹⁷⁵ However, Operation Overlord, an amphibious landing on France, remained the main focus of the Allies. The dominant voice of the Allies that wanted to take a share in Central Europe and reduce the spheres of influence Stalin loomed over, was Winston Churchill. He was even said to be anxious to keep the Red Army out of Austria, Romania, and Hungary, if possible at all.¹⁷⁶ But the breaking point was the Americans. At the Teheran Conference in November 1943, the US did not take any interest to go into Eastern Europe or the Balkans when the French route seemed to be clear and straight into Germany. The American focus was the invasion of France and they did not want to steer away from it with another offensive. Churchill alone suggested an Allied dash toward Vienna, moving in through the Ljubljana Gap. The American response was the Allied military operations would be on southern Europe only, remaining non-committal to the Balkans and Eastern Europe. To Churchill, however, this was the last opportunity for the Allies to save Eastern Europe from complete Soviet occupation and dominance.¹⁷⁷ This included Hungary via Trieste as another possibility. Yet, the American strategy remained the only pattern of conquest, and which Stalin

¹⁷⁴ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 288-289.

¹⁷⁵ Combined Chiefs of Staff Minutes, November 28, 1943, *FRUS*, J.C.S. Files, doc. 361.

¹⁷⁶ Remi Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 79.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

supported.¹⁷⁸ Above all, the containment of the Soviet Union within its pre-war boundaries would be inconceivable. The *fait accompli* was such that at the war's end, the Red Army was the sole power in South-Eastern Europe.

Hungary's sovereignty had been infringed severely ever since the Germans took political control of the country. Activities of Gestapo in Hungary could not be supervised or monitored by the Hungarian authorities; the German Minister in Hungary used the title "Special Commissioner of the Führer" –a title which was usually used in occupied countries and not in allied countries such as Bulgaria or Romania.¹⁷⁹ Another drastic measure Germany took was on the question of the Jewish population in Hungary. Within two months of the German occupation, the Hungarian Parliament passed its "Third Jewish Law,"¹⁸⁰ which practically mirrored the Nazi Nuremberg Laws. In addition to that, the Hungarian help for the SS to root out the Jewish population was unprecedented in any other European country. As Eichmann recalled, Hungary was the most compliant to the point that the SS was slow in the execution of the orders compared to the

¹⁷⁸ Richard M. Leighton, "Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942-1944," *The American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (July 1963), 921.

¹⁷⁹ The Consul General at İstanbul (Berry) to the Secretary of State. July 3, 1944, *FRUS*, The British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 810.

¹⁸⁰ The first one was passed during the administration of Prime Minister Darányi in 1938, which aimed at the restriction of the Jewish people in economic activities. As opposed to the Nuremberg Laws, this first law considered Jewish not of race, but of religion. The Second Jewish Law was introduced by the Prime Minister Pál Teleki in 1939. This extended the attribution of "Jewish" both to racial and religious considerations. The limit was on the Jewish representation in public and the economy. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 73-74 and 106-108.

Hungarians.¹⁸¹ The 800,000 Jews, who were living in relative peace in Hungary up to March 1944, faced direct and indirect persecution.¹⁸²

In late July 1944, a group formed out of every corner of Hungary –from extreme Left to Christian Socialists to Small Land Owners Party to the Hungarian Clergy –to resist German invasion and German policies in Hungary.¹⁸³ This collaboration was on an unprecedented scale remembering the situation in pre-war Hungary, and it looked to the United Nations (UN) for moral support.¹⁸⁴ The complication this and similar but smaller resistance groups suffered in Hungary was the fact that Hungary was still considered an “enemy state” by the Allied countries, who, therefore refrained from giving political or moral support.

5.2. Negotiations with the Soviets and German Invasion of Hungary

On August 20, the Red Army’s offensive into Romania carried it so deep into the country that by the end of the month, Bucharest was less than 50 kilometers away. In a

¹⁸¹ Robert M. Bigler, “Heil Hitler und Heil Horthy! The Nature of Hungarian Racist Nationalism and Its Impact on German-Hungarian Relations 1919-1945,” *East European Quarterly* VIII, no. 3 (Fall 1974), 266.

¹⁸² Some Jews were deported to the ghettos. With the largest Jewish population, Kassa became the transfer hub. Also, the southern Hungary was turned into military operational zones where the German authorities rounded up the Jewish population. For more on the German actions against the Jewish population in Hungary after March 1944, see Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: the Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

¹⁸³ The resistance to Nazi Germany was very little in Hungary throughout the war. All the resistance with potential to spread was crushed by 1943. A year later, the partisans were smuggled into the Hungarian territory via the Soviet Union. Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler’s Europe 1939-1945* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1982), 228. The guerilla units were in Bácska, Baranya, and Ruthenia; however those guerillas were either of Serbian or Ukrainian origin. Fenyő, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary*, 245.

¹⁸⁴The Chargé in Spain (Butterworth) to the Secretary of State. July 27, 1944, *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 812.

couple of days, the *Wehrmacht* started to withdraw from Greece in order to avoid a possible cut-off of its lines. By early September, Romania had capitulated to the Red Army and declared war on Bulgaria.¹⁸⁵ Romania's defection and the intelligence reports Germany was gathering that Hungary was trying to conclude a separate peace with the Allied governments were joined by another indicator that Horthy had installed a military government under General Geisa Lakatos instead of the German-installed Sztójay regime. Lakatos' willingness to negotiate with the Soviets differed from Kállay's insistence on contact with the western powers only.¹⁸⁶ This was what they were told to do in their contact with the American and British long before. Horthy attempted to get in touch with the Anglo-Americans to propose that Hungary might lean on the decision to turn against the Germans if the Anglo-American troops occupied key positions in Hungary and keep the Soviet and Romanian troops on halt. Without this assurance, Hungary would remain Germany's ally. This, in the eyes of the Americans and the British, justified the Soviet insistence on a direct Hungarian offer of surrender to the all three Allies, as Hungary refused to be placed under the Soviet control once they surrendered.¹⁸⁷ Horthy had no choice but to seek direct contact with the Soviets.

At the beginning of October, a secret Hungarian mission authorized by the Regent Horthy went to Moscow to present Stalin with conditions Hungary was ready to accept. Those constituted fighting against the Germans together with the Soviet Army, a request of a quick Soviet occupation of Budapest, the cease of air bombardment of Hungary, and

¹⁸⁵ Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Borsody, "Soviet Foreign Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe and Hungary, 1941-1947," in *20th Century Hungary and the Great Powers*, ed. Ignác Romsics (New Jersey: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1995), 208.

¹⁸⁷ Memorandum by Mr. John Coert Campbell of the Division of Southern European Affairs. November 4, 1944. *FRUS*, British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 853.

demanding the Romanian troops not to cross the frontiers that were established in 1940.¹⁸⁸ Stalin found the conditions unsatisfactory and unacceptable. Speaking on behalf of both the US and the UK, the Soviets put forward the preliminary condition stated priorly to the Hungarian mission that Hungary withdraws from the territories it occupied after 1937 in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania within 10 days; as well as a Hungarian declaration of war on Germany.¹⁸⁹

Hungary accepted the preliminary armistice conditions –a *volte-face*, which was put directly under the Soviet military supervision. The British and Americans also agreed to the Soviet suggestion that the armistice discussion with Hungary takes place in Moscow.¹⁹⁰ The Americans acknowledged that in the case of Hungary, the Soviet Union would handle the decisions in the light of the Soviet military dominance in Eastern Europe.¹⁹¹ The British resentment over the American acknowledgment continued well into the post-1945. The Soviet primary concern was more political and military dominance than a fear of economic disruption the policies they would pursue in central Europe would cause.¹⁹² They were, however, cognizant of the fact that in the immediate post-hostilities period, the countries in east and central Europe would not be apt to carry out their policies strictly due to the economic restraints.

On the eastern front, followed after Operation Bagration, consecutive Soviet offensives aimed toward the south continued. From August to early September 1944, the 2nd and 3rd

¹⁸⁸ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. October 6, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol.III, doc. 826.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Péter Sipos, István Vida and Julianna Parti, “The Policy of the United States towards Hungary during the Second World War,” *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29, no. 1 (1983), 81-82.

¹⁹² The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. October 16, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.839.

Ukrainian Fronts,¹⁹³ respectively under Marshal Malinovsky and Tolbukhin, pushed the Romanian formations further back, taking the Ploesti oilfields. With the Soviet armies now at the Carpathian Mountains and at the gates of Slovakia, Hitler's last vital source of oil, Lake Balaton in Hungary, lay exposed to the Soviets.¹⁹⁴ Defending eastern Hungary and Slovakia, the Hungarian troops fought more determinedly in the battles for the Carpathian mountain range. Considering the swift collapse of Romania, this was a surprise for the occupying Soviet troops as well. Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front aimed to encircle eastern Hungary. The Debrecen Operation of October 6, met with resistance within two weeks from the Third Panzer and Seventeenth Corps. Malinovsky's forces now turned toward the south near Széged and to Budapest, achieving a breakthrough of the Hungarian Third Army.¹⁹⁵ However, this attack, too, met with tough resistance and another counterattack launched by the Panzergrenadier Division *Feldhernhalle*. Concurrently, Admiral Horthy attempted to make covert contacts with the Soviet Union to conclude a separate peace and leave the Axis. The Kremlin demanded that Hungary declare war on Germany. On October 11, the Hungarian representatives signed an agreement in Moscow.

On October 15, Horthy made a radio announcement that Hungary intended to begin negotiations for an armistice with the Allies.¹⁹⁶ On the same day as Horthy's announcement, Operation *Panzerfaust* was launched. The SS commando leader who

¹⁹³ In Soviet military, a *front* was a military organization roughly equivalent to an army group; it is not to be confused with the widely used meaning as the front line in war.

¹⁹⁴ The local forces also took part along with the German division. The remnants of the 1st Hungarian Armored Division defended the area around Castle Hill in Buda. Beevor, *The Second World War*, 636 and 678.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 645.

¹⁹⁶ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. October 16, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 841.

operated Mussolini's rescue operation a year earlier, Otto Skorzeny, arrived in Budapest to apprehend Horthy, later to be replaced by Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross Party. Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, who conducted the mass executions in the Warsaw Uprising just two months earlier, was to oversee the operation. The operation spanned the kidnap of Horthy's son Nicklas as a tool of blackmail to deter the Regent from defection in the war. Skorzeny's men kidnapped the son wrapped up in a carpet, put in a lorry and sent off to upper Austria –the Mauthausen Concentration Camp as his final destination.¹⁹⁷ Horthy agreed to step down and went to Germany two days later in the company of Skorzeny.

Horthy would spend the remainder of the war, confined in Schloß Hirschberg in Upper Bavaria. His attempt to disengage Hungary from the German alliance had failed. On November 3, Szálasi swore in as prime minister and head of the country. He did not dissolve the Parliament, but essentially the Arrow Cross Party held practical power over the country's politics. Szálasi placed the military matters and economic resources into the German hands. There were also measures against the Jewish population in the western side of Hungary: about 125,000 Jewish men were sent off to military forced labor, about 33,000 were moved into international ghettos, and many were shot.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945*, 735.

¹⁹⁸ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 337.

5.3. Russian Advance on Hungary

What landed the Red army at the gates of Budapest was, in essence, a carefully and meticulously planned and executed operation along with deep exploitation that started off with the Iassy-Kishinev Operation on August 20, 1944. In the planning phase, the *Stavka*¹⁹⁹ took into consideration the political motives: the spread of the Soviet power over the regions of Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The strategic objective was Germany's oil reserves in the Ploești oil fields in Romania and Lake Balaton in Hungary.²⁰⁰ The Iassy-Kishinev Operation was a great success for the Red Army, Malinovsky and Tolbukhin, the victorious commanders of the drive on Budapest, were promoted to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union after the operation.²⁰¹

The Budapest operation and the consequent offensives lasted longer than those in Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. From October 1944 to February 1945, the Red Army fought to capture the whole country.²⁰² It was a two-front operation and with the capture of Hungary in the end, the Soviet offensive was carried into the confines of Austria. The year 1944 marked the Soviet military victories with ten consequent operations that bled the *Wehrmacht* white; the German forces and the reserves on the Eastern Front were reduced and destroyed to a significant degree. Stalin's ten blows

¹⁹⁹ The *Stavka* was of the Supreme High Command (VGK – *Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniya*) of the Soviet forces and it was the highest military organization during the war.

²⁰⁰ Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 218.

²⁰¹ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: the Nazi-Soviet War 1941-1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 332.

²⁰² Hitler had occupied the country in March 1944 under the Operation *Margarethe*.

(*Desyat' stalinskikh udarov*) were the largest strategic operations from 1944 to 1945.²⁰³

The seventh of these blows was the Iassy- Kishinev Operation by the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts that resulted in the defeat of large German and Romanian troops belonging to Army Group South in Ukraine. As a result, Romania and later Bulgaria withdrew from the war,²⁰⁴ opening the way for the Red Army into Hungary and the rest of the Balkans. The ninth stroke was the Budapest Offensive, which began on October 28, 1944.²⁰⁵ The Red Army started concentrated on the northern part of the Carpathians, between the Tisza and Danube Rivers as well as on eastern Yugoslavia. Consequently, the German Army Group South was eliminated; Trans-Carpathian Ukraine was cleared out, and this created the conditions for a subsequent offensive on Austria and southern Germany.

In command, R. Ia. Malinovsky and F. I. Tolbukhin spearheaded the attacks with 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, which aimed toward the joint German-Romanian forces in Iassy, Kishinev, and Bendery regions. The ultimate objectives of the offensive were the industrial areas in the northern part; namely, Budapest, Győr, Miskolc, Esztergom, and Székesfehérvár.²⁰⁶ Three days later when the offensive started, a coup in Bucharest

²⁰³ Initially, these operations were not under a common name, and their planning were conducted based on the logic and need of military events on the Soviet western front. The term was later widely used referring to these operations, mainly to glorify Stalin and his role in the Great Patriotic War.

²⁰⁴ Bulgaria never participated in Operation Barbarossa but allowed Hitler to use Bulgarian territory for the Wehrmacht for the invasions of Yugoslavia and Greece. Never declaring war on the Soviet Union, Bulgaria was officially at war with the rest of the Allies as of 1941. In September 1944, Bulgaria switched to the Allied side and fought along the Red Army in the Balkans, Hungary, and Vienna. Rotschild, *East Central Europe between the Wars*, 353.

²⁰⁵ By that time, the Karelian Front around Finland had defeated the German forces there; Finland was out of the war; the German forces in Minsk were encircled; Western Ukraine was taken. Soviet General Staff, *The Budapest Operation 1944: An Operational-Strategic Study*, ed. and trans. by Richard Harrison (Sollihul: Helion and Company, 2017), 23.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

occurred and the new Romanian government turned against Germany.²⁰⁷ With this new development, the collapse of the Romanian forces accelerated. And, by September 2, the Red Army captured the Ploești oil fields and Bucharest. Following that, the German and other Axis forces began a non-stop retreat across the Carpathian Mountains.²⁰⁸ With the new allies on the Soviet side, Malinovsky now had two Romanian armies; and Tolbukhin, Bulgarian and Yugoslav formations under their commands.²⁰⁹ German forces in Hungary comprised of the renamed Army Group South under the command of General Johannes Friessner, who had only two German and two Hungarian armies. The Hungarian forces included the First, Second, and Third Armies, some of which were Army Group South's reserve.²¹⁰ The Red Army deployed the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts for the Soviet advance in the Balkans and subsequent capture of Hungary. The 3rd Ukrainian Front was on the left flank of the 2nd Ukrainian Front with the mission of repelling German counteroffensives toward Budapest.

The first phase of the Soviet offensive was called the Debrecen operation, which opened on October 6, 1944. Within a month, the Soviet drive toward Budapest was checked by the Germans who prevented the possibility of an encirclement of the city with their operational reserves.²¹¹ With Malinovsky and Tolbukhin in the Balkans, another operation against the German defenses in the Carpathians was mounted earlier with the

²⁰⁷ The Allies started aerial bombings on Bucharest in April 1944. The Iassy-Kishinev Operation prompted the overthrow of Marshal Ion Antonescu. Not only did Romania defect but it also joined the ranks of the Red Army. The Allied bombings ceased the importance of Ploești oilfields. However, the German forces still made an attempt to counter the Romanians along with the Red Army. In the end, Army Group South (Army Group A before) had a collapsed front after the recurrent destruction of the Sixth Army and began to retreat. For the fate of German forces on the Romanian front see Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 436. On the defection of Romania see, Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 333.

²⁰⁸ Glantz and House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 220.

²⁰⁹ Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 337.

²¹⁰ Soviet General Staff, *The Budapest Operation 1945*, 173.

²¹¹ Glantz and House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 223.

aim of Slovakia and eastern Hungary. However, continuous arrival of reinforcements for Colonel General Gotthard Heinrici's defenses rendered the joint two-front Soviet offensive painstakingly slow. By the end of October, however, the Red Army had already captured all Ruthenia, Transylvania, Tiszántúl and half of Alföld.²¹²

Although the progress slowed down for the remainder of 1944, this major offensive was strategically important for the Soviets. Foremost, it drove Romania out of the war against the Allies, and some Romanian and Bulgarian armies joined the Red Army. Another strategic objective the Soviets gained was the Romanian oilfields and Hungarian granary. Those two were part of the backbone of the German economy. Because Hitler shifted several significant reserves down to the south for the defense of Hungary, the defense of the Warsaw-Berlin axis came in peril.²¹³ With Romania out of the Axis orbit, Hungary became the main theater of operations down south on the eastern front. The Red Army now added the Romanian army to its ranks for the push toward the Hungarian capital.

In November, the Soviet progress almost came to a standstill. Perceived to be the strongest Soviet Army, Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front, and the 4th Ukrainian Front, which advanced only 200 kilometers into Hungary since August, received Marshall Semion Konstantinovich Timoshenko to investigate the matter. Also involved in the investigation was Marshall Tolbukhin, the commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front in Serbia. He was not part of the drive toward Budapest but since the 2nd Ukrainian Front needed support there and since Stalin altered his political plans for the Balkans after his

²¹² Macartney, *October Fifteenth* Vol. II, 453.

²¹³ Glantz and House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 225.

talks with Churchill a month before, the Soviet advance in the Balkans was not given any priority.

In accordance with Timoshenko's report on the Hungarian front, Malinovsky handed over the 5th Cavalry Corps over to Tolbukhin, strengthening the western line in southern Transdanubia so that the approach of the offensive would be from the southwest. If we look at the other Soviet military success in the rest of Europe, by the end of September, Estonia was almost completely cleared of the German forces. And, by the end of October, the Red Army was at the gates of East Prussia. By the end of 1944, only Hungary was left on the side of Germany.²¹⁴ The German isolation was apparent with the Red Army in East Prussia in the North, by the Vistula River in Poland and by the Danube River in Hungary. At the same time, the Red Army was capable of taking the rest of Poland, Austria, and Hungary in a single final thrust.

In December, when the last German major offensive in the Ardennes commenced, the Soviet operations in Hungary continued with the 2nd Ukrainian Front and 3rd Ukrainian Front. They penetrated the German *Margareithe* line between Lake Balaton and the region south of Budapest, encircling several SS divisions and Hungarian units. However, taking Budapest proved to be more difficult than it looked. Malinovsky's idea of creating two separate groups, one tasked with reducing Buda, and another group –in which a Romanian corps was present –to seize Pest were not very effective in taking ground.²¹⁵ Just as Hitler poured reinforcements in and around Hungary to defend his last satellite, therefore weakening the western front, the *Stavka* poured in large formations

²¹⁴ Ibid., 232.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 234.

there, which put a toll on the Soviet outer encirclement line west of the city. This caused the Germans to relieve the almost trapped garrison.

The German Department of Foreign Armies East (*Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost*) had warned and signaled the approaching Soviet offensive in December. The German reinforcements in Transdanubia were to form a firm line that would not budge with the commitment of a smaller strength. These were three panzer battalions, the Fourth Cavalry Brigade, and several other panzer divisions with 400 tanks and 40,000 men in total.²¹⁶ The German offensive in December was put off due to lack of fuel and ammunition in addition to the bad weather conditions. With the advance of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, Heinz Guderian, as the Acting Chief of the General Staff, ordered to split the panzers divisions and the armored grenadiers. This deprived the main German body that would initiate the attack around Székesfehérvár, of infantry. The grenadiers would join the defense at the Ipsoly River. This measure was unfavorable and rendered the split forces disadvantageous; the rationale of employment of armored divisions is that it possesses firepower and mobility, the latter due to infantry that would hold captured ground after the effective firepower of the panzers. Separated in order to carry out a counteroffensive and a defense at the same time, the German forces failed to check Malinovsky's 7th Guard Army near Esztergom and Tolbukhin's assault with his 3rd Ukrainian Front.²¹⁷

As early as September 1944, well before the Soviet offensive toward Budapest commenced, the Hungarian supreme Command had warned the German supreme

²¹⁶ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 25-26. Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 437.

²¹⁷ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 27.

command that Budapest would become a front-line city soon enough as the Hungarian Third Army would be unable to resist on its own. German reinforcements on their way to the defense of Budapest consisted of the 503rd Heavy Panzer Battalion, some parts of the Twenty-Fourth Panzer Division, and the Maria Theresia Twenty-Second SS Volunteer Cavalry Division made up largely of ethnic Swabians in Hungary.²¹⁸ In the entire January 1945, the Red Army and the Wehrmacht along with the SS were engaged in heavy fighting on the outskirts of Budapest. The primary Soviet objective was to take Pest; the Stavka pressured Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front to do so.

Meanwhile, the Szálasi government was not insistent on defending the capital with every means possible. Szálasi suggested a retreat into western Hungary because he reasoned that while the government stayed and the Hungarian army defended the city, some parts of the population might rise up and turn against the army, this, in turn, would make keeping the order and fighting against the Red Army extremely difficult. So, in early December, Szálasi moved the government and the whole state administration from Budapest to the western Hungarian cities –Szombathely, Sopron, and Köszeg.²¹⁹ As the Hungarian government moved west, Germany requested the dismantling of factories and other industrial equipment to be shipped to Germany so as to deny them to the advancing Russians. It was Adolf Hitler only, who wanted Budapest to be defended. Tasked with the defense of Budapest, three separate German organizations whose jurisdictions were obscure: the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS, and the diplomatic SS representation headed by SS Obergruppenführer Otto Winkelmann, who was also the

²¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁹ Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 350.

head of the German police and the SS in Hungary.²²⁰ For Hitler, the defense of Budapest was as imperative as his Ardennes offensive in the west.

On December 23, the Red Army took Székesfehérvár. Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's primary objective was the capital but never has the Red Army besieged a city as big and as populous as Budapest before. The siege of Budapest, therefore, constrained fifteen Soviet and three Romanian divisions. As the 4th Guards Army took Bicske, cutting the roads to the west of Budapesti Otto Wöhler, the Commander of Army Group South, tried to reason with Guderian that throughout history Budapest had always been defended on the west bank of Danube and suggested not to hold Budapest. However, Hitler was determined; the OKH was to send SS divisions *Totenkopf* and *Wiking* from Army Group Center as well as providing more reinforcements later.²²¹ By the end of December, a reversal of plans for Budapest was beyond the bounds of military possibility. Tolbukhin's spearhead had reached Esztergom, completing the encirclement.

At the end of December, the Hungarian Provisional Government in Debrecen declared war on Germany, and a month later they signed an armistice treaty with the Allies in Moscow. There, they agreed to commit eight divisions²²² to fight on the Allied side against Germany.²²³ This was a blown-up figure as Hungary lacked both the personnel and the equipment to commit a force of that magnitude. Another major setback Germany

²²⁰ Only after staying at his post for 4 days, Winkelmann resigned because Hitler did not approve his suggestion of abandoning the Pest bridgehead and his concerns for defending the city. Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 31.

²²¹ Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: the German Defeat in the East* (Washington: Center of Military History United States Army, 2002), 386.

²²² Approximately 140,000 soldiers.

²²³ Zoltan D. Barany, *Soldiers and Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-90* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 33.

experienced by the end of 1944 was the dwindling oil production.²²⁴ Romania's defect forced Germany to resort to synthetic oil production but the Allied heavy bombings on the industrial areas crippled this alternative. The Hungarian oil fields at Nagykanizsa were insufficient to supply the army due to the Soviet capture of oil refineries around Budapest.

In 1945, the entire city of Budapest with its just over a million inhabitants was trapped without sufficient food and health sources (See Figure 8). The Hungarian forces for the defense of Budapest made up 30% of the total forces with a combat strength of 15,055 men.²²⁵ The Hungarian military found the defense operation and the breakthrough futile. The German air supply would not be carried out owing to bad weather as well as a gasoline shortage. To break the encirclement of Budapest, the *Wehrmacht* planned three major offensives, code-named *Konrad*, all of which ultimately failed, depleting Army Group A and its auxiliary forces along the Baltic to the Carpathians.

Konrad I started off on the first day of January 1945 as the Fourth Panzer Corps attacked Tata-Almásfüzitő region, and the Ninety-Sixth Infantry Division crossed the Danube from the north. Stalled in northern Hungary, the *Wehrmacht* moved on to the southern sector and decided to try a breakthrough between Székesfehérvár and Mór with new forces on January 7 under Operation *Konrad II*. Tolbukhin was aware of the German movements so a day later, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts launched a

²²⁴ Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 412.

²²⁵ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 57.

counterattack, with the aim to encircle the Germans. On January 9, a simultaneous German attack was from the north to breach the Red Army near Esztergom.²²⁶

In January 1945, the Debrecen government organized four divisions to commit to the Soviet war effort, in the hopes that a tangible military contribution would win Hungary the Soviet favor and in turn, the country would receive less harsh peace terms at the post-war negotiations. Stalin permitted the first Hungarian division from Debrecen to take part in the combat activities in the front in Austria, where they would be subordinated to Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front.²²⁷ The Debrecen division never really took part in the front line duties but they did carry out rear-guard activities. By January 17, the block-by-block fighting had gained the Red Army Pest, which they took by splitting their main forces and the city into two. The German forces fell back to the west side of the Danube, Buda.²²⁸ With Pest lost, the German casualties amounted to almost 100,000. A day later, the Fourth SS Panzer corps launched *Konrad III* from the region between Lake Balaton and Székesfehérvár. They managed it to keep it a surprise attack, driving a wedge into the Soviet forces of Transdanubian front. On January 22, the Red Army lost Székesfehérvár.²²⁹ However, the newly gained German ground was susceptible to fall as the Soviet forces under Tolbukhin initiated a counter-attack from both south and north toward northern Székesfehérvár. Soon, the Germans had to give up

²²⁶ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 164-65.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²²⁸ Glantz, House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 235. At around the same time, Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Front was preparing an attack on the German forces in Warsaw. The critical situation required more German reinforcements as the Upper Silesia was in danger. However, Hitler did not let the Fourth SS Panzer Corps out of Hungary, holding fast down south. Moreover, Panzer Corps Grossdeutschland along with its two divisions were sent down to the defense of Hungary. Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 444. These decisions did not relieve the Hungarian capital and the Soviet encirclement of East Prussia became all the more imminent.

²²⁹ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 169.

most of the territories they captured. The intense fighting in Budapest, which continued until the middle of February, seemed to surpass that in Stalingrad. On February 13, 1945, the Red Army captured Buda. And, nine days after the Yalta conference, the Red Army occupied entire Budapest and a Soviet drive toward Vienna had begun.

In the meantime, Hitler envisaged an operation code-named *Frühlingserwachen* (Spring Awakening) to create a more solid buffer zone between the Red Army and the Nagykanizsa oil fields.²³⁰ For this, Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army would spearhead the Operation. Together with the Sixth Army, they commenced from Lake Balaton and Lake Velenceze with the aim of southern Budapest. The Operation included ten panzer divisions; among them were *Adolf Hitler*, *Das Reich*, and *Hitlerjugend* divisions.²³¹ However, the Red Army proved to be resilient; added to that was the muddy roads and German lack of oil supplies. The first ten days of continuous fighting resulted in heavy losses for the Sixth SS Panzer Army.

The primary operations for the Red Army now were to clear the flanks of the Soviet forces in Upper Silesia, and to capture the west and southwest of Budapest, opening the way to Vienna. These two tasks were to commence on March 15. Hitler ordered the relocation of one his last armored reserves, the Sixth SS Panzer Army under the command of General Sepp Dietrich from the Ardennes to Hungary. On March 6, 1945, together with the German Sixth Army, the Sixth SS Panzer Army set in motion a pincer movement from the north and south of Lake Balaton.²³² There was a short-lived German

²³⁰ Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 450. Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 438.

²³¹ Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 339.

²³² The German forces included ten panzer divisions, five infantry divisions including King Tiger tanks Glantz and House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 253.

break-through toward Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front, Tolbukhin requested more reserves for his section, but he was not granted support. The German advance came to a halt on March 15, the date for the planned Soviet Operation. The losses on both sides were enormous, however; the Soviet forces were able to withstand that blow. For the next two days, the Red Army attacked the German defenses west of Budapest and gradually but swiftly, the German defense began to disintegrate. Now, the Sixth SS Panzer Army had its back on Lake Balaton.²³³ The bad weather played to the German's favor, avoiding entrapment in the region but the Red Army entered Vienna on April 13 shortly before the Soviet Offensive at the Oder for Berlin.

In February 1945, all available German and Hungarian reserves were transferred to Hungary. Hitler aimed to protect the last remaining oil reserves of the Axis, located in western Hungary, and to block the Soviet advance into Vienna. These two aims made Hungary a vital theater of war for Germany. By February 1945, with Budapest taken, the Red Army faced rigid German resistance that kept delaying the advance up the Danube. At the same time, Churchill still did not abandon the idea that the Allies would make a dash for Vienna. When a complete German surrender in Italy took place, his next target in mind was Austria as he desired to keep the Soviet advance in Europe in check. But these ideas were never realized without any support from the U.S. Thus, Churchill believed that all the Balkans, save for Greece, would fall into the Soviet hands.²³⁴

²³³ Ibid. 254.

²³⁴ Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe*, 89.

5.4. Assessment

The Budapest Operation is one of the bloodiest operations in the history of the Second World War. The casualties of the Red Army were reported to be totaling around 320,000 in wounded and dead.²³⁵ The operation eliminated Hungary off the war, fighting on the German side. The defeat of the Hungarian Army and the occupation of the capital cleared the way for the Red Army's next advance on Vienna and southern Germany. With the operation between October 28, 1944, and February 13, 1945, the Soviet Union ultimately gained Hungary. Although Hitler provided new reinforcements for the defense of Budapest, those had serious supply problems as well as lacking combat strength. Despite these problems, Germany's three ensuing counter-attacks were either pre-empted or totally forced to fail by the Red Army. Yet, the *Konrad* operations succeeded in somewhat depleting the Russian strength. Throughout the course of the operation, four German divisions were completely obliterated; by 1945 half of the German panzer divisions on the eastern front that made up of 30% of the total strength, were defending Hungary.²³⁶ Simultaneously, General Zhukov was less than 100 km away from taking Berlin.

In the last phase of the battle, between December 1944 and January 1945, Hitler decided to send the Sixth Panzer Army, which fell back from the Ardennes to Hungary, instead of directing it to Poland. He also refused to declare Budapest a free city. Why was

²³⁵ Ungváry, *Battle for Budapest*, 311.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

Hitler so committed to Hungary?²³⁷ Having lost the Romanian oilfields, he gave utmost importance to defend the oilfields around Lake Balaton at Nagykanizsa. The defense of Budapest, by that time, had become a political necessity, the heavy reinforcements Hitler had provided for the city were expected to generate results. Moreover, the defense of Budapest also meant blocking a direct route Austria and Bohemia –a strategically vital position.

For the Allies, winning the war was the priority while Stalin pre-calculated the peace terms while still in the war. After occupying all of Eastern and Central Europe, he would have the upper hand once the peace talks started. Churchill’s anxiety stemmed from his being cognizant of this fact, while Roosevelt also had American public support in mind for his every move. During Churchill’s visit to Moscow in October, he mentioned his suggestion to deploy the Allied forces to the Carpathian Basin; this prompted Stalin to force the pace of the Red Army onto Budapest.

After the signing of the armistice treaty, Horthy was arrested by the German authorities and confined to Dachau, and later Buchenwald. Then, he had remained as a prisoner of war of the Americans for a year. After the war ended, he went to Portugal where he found refuge and left untouched by Stalin. Despite the Yugoslav leader Tito’s pressure to put Horthy on trial as a war criminal for his leadership in the invasion of Yugoslavia and the subsequent atrocities the Hungarian officials committed in Novisad, Stalin did not request a trial for war crimes or extradition from Horthy, whom he said, “after all did

²³⁷ Glantz and House argue that his decision was all the more incomprehensible, for the Stavka launched a new offensive on the Vistula when the decision was taken. Glantz and House, *When the Titans Clashed*, 236.

ask for an armistice.”²³⁸ Szálasi, after Horthy, was put on trial in Hungary in 1946 and executed. By the end of the war in 1945, Hungary’s political atmosphere was no different than as it was in 1919: a coalition government was formed, but with heavy dominance of communists.²³⁹

²³⁸ Stephen J. Lee, *European Dictatorships, 1918-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 267. Thomas Sakmyster, “Miklós Horthy and the Allies, 1945-1946: Two Documents,” *Hungarian Studies Review* XXIII, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), 68.

²³⁹ Lee, *European Dictatorships*, 268.

CHAPTER VI

STUNDE NULL: THE SOVIET INFLUENCE ON HUNGARY IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR PERIOD (1945-1946)

Male Parta Male Dilabuntur (What has been wrongly gained is wrongly lost) – Virgil or

Vergilius Maro (70 BC- 19 BC)

“It would be a measureless disaster if Russian barbarianism overlaid the culture and independence of the ancient states of Europe.” Winston Churchill²⁴⁰

Soviet ascendancy after the battle of Stalingrad was visible and shaped the direction of the rest of the war, as well as the fate of Europe. Josef Stalin’s motives for a post-war Soviet sphere of influence did not only include ideology. In fact, territorial expansion

²⁴⁰ Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe*, 27.

was a larger motive. Except for Finland, it was only Czechoslovakia and Hungary in Europe that were not direct Soviet satellite states after the war.²⁴¹ Preserving the status of a “victor state,” the occupation of Czechoslovakia did not last for long.²⁴²

Following the First World War, Hungary was not part of the *cordon sanitaire*, so it found itself *vis-à-vis* the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia) – countries which were protected by France and which acquired Hungarian territories. Come 1919, Hungary was the only country in Europe that had a Soviet republic, though for a brief period; and the only country to lose two-thirds of national territories, which it had possessed for centuries. By 1940, Hungary regained almost all of its lost territories thanks to German and Italian arbitration.²⁴³

The status of Hungary was, however, atypical throughout the war. Fighting on the German side against the Soviet Union, Hungary’s motive was seemingly ideological. Hungary had no territorial claims against the Soviet Union. The idea of fighting against Bolshevism was what fuelled the Hungarian politicians and the people in the beginning. However, the Hungarian territorial gains that Germany helped achieve were also on the stake for Hungary. Hungary remained on the side of Germany even though complete defeat was imminent. Before the Second World War, Hungary was not within the political orbit of either the Soviet Union or the United States – the British had had ties

²⁴¹ Eric Roman, *Hungary and the Victor Powers 1945-1950* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 2.

²⁴² Unlike Hungary, Czechoslovakia was a product of the Treaty of Versailles after the Great War. It had been artificially constructed out of four provinces or duchies, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe*, 51.

²⁴³ Upper Hungary ceded by Czechoslovakia, November 1938; Carpatho-Ukraine gained at the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, March 1939; Northern Transylvania ceded by Romania, June 1940.

with this Danubian country, dating back to the 1920s.²⁴⁴ However, immediately after the war, having economically and militarily invested in Europe and come out of it as a victor, the United States approached Europe and its post-war problems as part of its political agenda to ensure the already-endorsed idealistic principles. In the case of Hungary, the US did not oppose the Soviet expansion of political influence.

6.1. The Political Situation in Hungary at the End of the War

Through the end of the war, Hungary had two separate governments, belligerent to one another. The fighting fronts marked the territories they had control over. The government operating in western Hungary still carried the resistance together with Nazi Germany. The Szálasi government controlled western Hungary and Budapest only. It never surrendered and eventually fled the country wholesale; that is, the entire government, the bureaucracy cadre, the armed forces as well as the police force –the entire state apparatuses- evacuated to Germany where they did not last a month.²⁴⁵ The other government in Debrecen established by the Soviet Union was recognized by the Allies. Although the Debrecen government was established without consulting the Allies, the military dominance of the Soviet Union in the region as well as the multi-representation in the new government prevented the Allies to object. And the first act it

²⁴⁴ Although Great Britain did not exercise much power in South-Eastern Europe after the First World War, leaving the initiative to the French, the British economically supported Hungary in the 1920s with loans so as to save Hungary from international isolation. For more on Hungarian-British relations see András D. Bán, *Hungarian-British Diplomacy 1938-1941* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2005).

²⁴⁵ Roman, *Hungary and the Victor Powers*, 7.

did was to declare war on Germany.²⁴⁶ Its immediate political goal was to conclude an armistice. The efforts for a peace settlement had been continuing for two years, but those efforts were directed at the British and the American, bypassing the Soviet Union.

The US government perceived the Hungarian efforts as rather suspicious. After all, Hungary was an Axis satellite country that joined the invasion of the USSR; furthermore, it declared war both on the United States and the other states of the United Nations as well as invading Yugoslavia and swallowing up a large part of Transylvania which formerly belonged to Romania.²⁴⁷ The main Hungarian concern that lay in the “unconditional surrender” was handing everything over to the Russians. In March 1944, Hungarian ministers all over Europe were considering supporting a resistance movement, preferably headed by Eckhardt in cooperation with Pelényi.²⁴⁸ All the telegram trafficking regarding an open and physical opposition to Nazi Germany was monitored by the Allied countries. The Hungarian minister in Stockholm proposed to adopt the name *Szabad Magyarok Nemzeti Mozgalma* (Free Hungarian National Movement), which would strive for collaboration with the Allies in their respective missions.²⁴⁹

A month later, when the terms of surrender for Germany and other “European Enemy States” were on the table, the British also suggested to its American and Soviet counterparts that the case of Hungary be included within the same categorization;

²⁴⁶ Borsody, “Soviet Foreign Policy,” 209.

²⁴⁷ Memorandum by the Division of Southern European Affairs, March 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 785.

²⁴⁸ The Minister in Portugal (Norweb) to the Secretary of State. March 25, 1944, *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol.III, doc.788. Pelenyi was a professor at Dartmouth College.

²⁴⁹ The Minister in Sweden (Johnson) to the Secretary of State. March 26, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol.III, doc.789.

especially not in isolation from that of Romania.²⁵⁰ In proposed terms regarding the surrender of Hungary, the emphasis was on the fact that Hungary did not withdraw its political support from Germany despite the Allied warnings, and that directly placed Hungary in the same course as Germany for the consequences of defeat. Ever since the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944 and the establishment of a puppet regime under the Horthy Regency, the Allies warned Hungary that it should cease its collaboration with Germany both politically and economically so that Hungary would meet less harsh terms if it surrendered before the defeat of Germany was imminent. But the main concern of the Allies lay in doing that without a compromise of their own war aims. Generosity would lead to alienation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the countries that bore the Hungarian aggression during the war, as well as appear as justifiable in the eyes of Fascist Hungarian groups which held influence for more than twenty years in Hungary. Yet, strictly harsh terms of surrender might alienate the Hungarian public to such an extent that the Hungarian Government's resistance to the Allied terms would win their support, creating another Trianon 'Syndrome'.

The terms included that Hungary withdraw to the pre-September 1, 1938 borders; the Allied Governments feel free in any way they deem appropriate to exercise their rights of occupation in any or all parts of Hungarian territory; all the material and military support be given to the Allied troops in their military operations against Germany; that Hungary be not given the status of co-belligerency in those operations.²⁵¹ The term which worried the Hungarians the most was whether the country would be deprived of

²⁵⁰The British Embassy to the Department of State, Memorandum. August 11, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 815.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

its independence and be subjugated to the Soviet control. The Allies assured Hungary of their territorial integrity within their pre-1938 borders and its future role in the Danubian region. As for the occupation of Hungary, neither Czechoslovakia nor Yugoslavia would take part in it as their mutual history with Hungary would evoke resentment within Hungary. However, there was a term specifically addressed the past Hungarian territorial aggression against all of its neighbors. Thus, the restorations of the borders with Czechoslovakia to the 1937 frontier, and with Yugoslavia to the 1940 frontier were the most outstanding. The Vienna *diktat* of 1940 would also be reversed, giving Romania the lost part of Transylvania.²⁵²

By the spring of 1944, the Red Army was only 300 kilometers away from Romania. At the same time, Stalin was supporting the Communist partisans in Greece. This was when the Central European state of affairs fell into the radar of Britain. The fate of the Balkans after the war was shaped when Anthony Eden sat down to talk with Fyodor Gusev, the Soviet Ambassador in London. The British minister's suggestion was that they would leave Romania to the Soviets while the Greek affairs would be the main British concern.²⁵³ A trade of spheres of influence seemed to suit the Soviets but they also demanded the American approval. They were aware that although Britain appeared to be independent on carving up Europe, the last word would belong to the US.

As the Red Army marched on Bulgaria and Romania, the British were now willing to leave these two countries to the Soviets while they took care of Yugoslavia and Greece.

The American reply to the British suggestion was that there should be a consultative

²⁵² The British Embassy to the Department of State, Memorandum. August 11, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 815.

²⁵³ Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe*, 110.

committee to decide on the fate of those four countries, which was a sign of naiveté for Churchill.²⁵⁴ With no American or British troops in Romania at all, it was almost certain that the Soviets would do whatever they wished there. Thus, it would be wiser to bargain with them where there was the Allied military presence so as to save the Balkans from completely falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. However, the only country Churchill could save from Soviet dominance was Greece. As Roosevelt did not give his full support to Churchill and as Stalin strengthened his ties with Tito in Yugoslavia and was marching on Hungary, Churchill had no more individual moves to make. Had the US given its full diplomatic support, perhaps Churchill could have had a better hand but considering the Soviet military dominance in East Europe and the Balkans, it would not be as certain.

In September 1944, the United States already voiced its desire and expectation to have political leverage in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria in the post-armistice period.²⁵⁵

The American observation of Hungary seemed to be that Hungary wished to see “Allied troops” on the Hungarian soil if the Soviet occupation is inevitable. Horthy stated that it was only through Allied military support that Hungary would carry out an effective fight against the German forces.²⁵⁶ Hungary’s assurances were of fighting against the Germans but they made no mention of an official declaration of war on Germany.

Although the Hungarian government did not wish to discuss the armistice with the Soviet Union, as the anti-Communism had been made the cornerstone of Horthy’s

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom, September 12, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.819.

²⁵⁶ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union, September 24, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol.III, doc.821.

regime ever since he came to power, the Allies had already settled the question of who would deal with Hungary. Churchill tried to commit the American side to a joint policy, which would aim to limit the Soviet influence in post-war Central Europe. Although the three Allied leaders had many political points on which they agreed and fell apart during the war, Churchill's analogy of the Soviet Union best sums up the British perspective in the war. Churchill confided to de Gaulle, likening the Soviet Union to a hungry wolf among sheep but he cautioned that there would be a digestion period for the wolf.²⁵⁷ Stalin would not be able to sustain the political dominance over Eastern Europe as well as economic restraints the region would bring along with it.

6.2. 'Bellum in Pace'

On October 9, 1944, Stalin and Churchill had sat down to talk in the Kremlin. On the discussion of the political fate of the Balkans after the war, Churchill drew up a list, which is now known as the "percentages agreement". The suggested division for Hungary between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies was 50% to 50%.²⁵⁸ The talks between Molotov and Eden resulted in the alteration of the percentage for Hungary as 20 to 80 percent. Such an agreement was neither logical nor practicable, as Charles Bohlen, the American specialist in Soviet affairs likened Churchill's proposal of such a

²⁵⁷ John Lukacs, *The Duel, the Eighty Day Struggle Between Churchill and Hitler*, 216.

²⁵⁸ Beevor, *the Second World War*, 639. Churchill also mentions this agreement in his World War Two Memoirs and interprets the question of the spheres of influence settled in one sitting. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 198.

partition to saying that “someone should be partially pregnant.”²⁵⁹ As for Stalin, the presence of the Red Army on Eastern Europe was evident enough to display the Soviet Union as the dominant voice in those territories, regardless of Churchill’s private consent to the deal on behalf of Great Britain. The United States, on the other hand, were not informed about the agreement nor did Roosevelt ever approve the ‘spheres of influence’ in Europe.

Thus, as a more realistic course, what Churchill saw as an ultimate solution to halt the Soviet influence in East-Central Europe was to accept and recognize the pro-Soviet governments to form as in the case of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The British Prime Minister deemed the Soviet military presence in Hungary as the “natural” cause of the political dominance of the Soviet Union there.²⁶⁰ “Natural” or not, ultimately the Red Army would not hand over any inch of soil to suit the political interest of the West. There was no immediate Communist take-over of the regime in Hungary but as time went by and Stalin grew dissatisfied with the Hungarian regime whose policies were not fully Communist, the engineering of full *Sovietization* began. The reason for the relatively slow process of Communist take-over in Hungary could be attributed to Stalin’s triage that gave the priority to his full and swift control of Poland. The undisrupted Soviet political balance *vis-à-vis* the US and Great Britain rested on what could be termed as controlled delays in *Sovietization* in Hungary. The case of Poland was what dragged Great Britain into open war with Germany, and by time it had become a matter of upholding British honor to keep control of the fate of Poland. Stalin was well aware of this, so he did not press on swift political domination in other South-Eastern

²⁵⁹ Max, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary*, 20.

²⁶⁰ Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 204.

European countries without settling the Polish issue first. For the rest of Soviet-occupied Europe, Stalin championed the notion of ‘people’s governments’. Coalition governments in the post-war Europe had ostensibly democratic participation, which the Soviet Union was able to reduce the influence, and ultimately the existence of. The fine line was that Stalin played by the Allied book; he always upheld the appearance that these Soviet-endorsed governments were indeed legal and self-sustaining.

On December 21, 1944, a “Provisional National Assembly” of Hungary and consequently a Hungarian government in Debrecen was formed with Zsedéni Béla, a professor of Law, as its chairman. The government at Debrecen was formed under Soviet auspices. The four parties that participated in this new Hungarian establishment were the Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP*), the National Peasant Party (*Nemzeti Paraszt Párt, NPP*), which was linked with the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party (*Szociáldemokrata Párt, SDP*), which was given legal political freedom under the Horthy regime; however, they did not pursue any political change or wider representation in Hungary, and the Smallholders Party (*Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt, KGP*), which was a party of Hungarian middle class of peasants.²⁶¹

The armistice agreement with Hungary was signed at Moscow, January 20, 1945. Voroshilov signed it on behalf of the Governments of the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States of America. A delegation from the provisional government at Debrecen was meant to go to Moscow to discuss armistice terms. For the Hungarian side Messrs. Janos Gyongyosi, Colonel General Janos Varos, and Istvan Balogh were

²⁶¹ Max, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary*, 9-10.

signatories.²⁶² Stalin authorized Marshal Voroshilov²⁶³ instead of Malinovski to sign the Hungarian armistice, as Voroshilov would be the chairman of the Allied Control Commission of Hungary. The US government also wished to authorize Voroshilov to sign the armistice on behalf of the US, according to which there would be only two signatures to the document, that of Voroshilov and that of the Hungarian representative.²⁶⁴ The terms of the armistice were based on those the Allies signed with Bulgaria and Romania without changing the contents of it. The absurdity of it was evident in one of the clauses which required Hungary, a land-locked country, to provide naval units for the Soviets.²⁶⁵

The first thing Molotov set forth was to make the Vienna ‘Award’ of August 1940 null and void.²⁶⁶ The three Allied powers all agreed on the armistice terms Hungary was to sign except on reparations and Control Commission. Hungary agreed, among all, to cease hostilities against the Allies; to disarm the German armed forces on Hungarian soil and hand them over as prisoners of war; to intern German nationals; to place land, sea, and air forces under the control of the Allied (Soviet) High Command; to demobilize the Hungarian Army, to evacuate the territories of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania (Back to 1937 borders), in other words, ceding back to ‘Trianon Hungary.’²⁶⁷

²⁶² The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. January 20, 1945. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 899.

²⁶³ Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, Assistant Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union.

²⁶⁴ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. January 14, 1945. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.894.

²⁶⁵ Laszlo Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War 1945-1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union* (Budapest:Central European University Press, 2004), 37.

²⁶⁶ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. December 30, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.875.

²⁶⁷ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. January 4, 1945. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.884.

The Hungarian irredentism had lived out its life; yet again, the Trianon marked the spot for Hungarian politics.

The MKP had been illegal in Hungary ever since the short-lived Béla Kun regime. So, they were mostly underground, with some members residing in the Soviet Union. After the Soviet occupation, the membership of the MKP skyrocketed from a mere 3,000 to 150,000 almost within a year.²⁶⁸ The SDP was banned after the German occupation in March 1944, but later they were able to operate in various urban areas, drawing an industrial-based membership. The KGP gathered support not only from middle-peasantry but also from the gentry and conservative population. In contrast, the NPP was a radical party that was stronger in eastern Hungary. Its membership majorly consisted of landless peasants. It was referred to as a “rural transmission belt of the Communists.”²⁶⁹ At the beginning of January, the MKP and SDP formed a joint committee to cooperate together in political and economic spheres.²⁷⁰

The general election was held on November 4, 1945. The KGP gained the majority with 57% of the votes with a landslide. It was followed by SDP (17%) and MKP (16%).²⁷¹ However, the election was a perfunctory step for the ACC, who dominated the distribution of political authorization among the parties soon after. As part of the coalition government; the MKP received the control of important government posts such as the Ministry of Interior and the political police.²⁷² The MKP, SDP, and NPP formed a

²⁶⁸ George Schöpflin, “Hungary,” in *Communist Power in Europe, 1944-1949*, ed. by Martin McCauley, (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), 96.

²⁶⁹ Schöpflin, “Hungary,” 97.

²⁷⁰ Well before the start of the World War II, these two parties did not get along well at all.

²⁷¹ Schöpflin, “Hungary,” 99.

²⁷² Since the government was a coalition, the control of the police force was imperative for the Soviet strategy. In order to consolidate the minor communist power, they appealed to the persisting fascist

leftist bloc in 1946, trying to undermine the activities and political figures of the KGP. Their proclamation referred to the traditions of Kossuth and the Revolution of 1848, calling for an independent and democratic Hungary. One curious mention in the proclamation was that the assembly called the Red Army as the “liberator of Hungary”.²⁷³ At the end of March, the Red Army was at the gates of Austria. By that time, Szálasi with his circle had fled the country already.²⁷⁴

6.3. The Extent of the American Influence in Hungary

After the war, the US sought to expand European economic dependency on itself, and as the continent was in need of urgent economic recovery, the US interests were met affirmatively. This economic dependency on the American model also brought along the American political agenda per se. During the armistice talks with Hungary, the US State Department tried to balance the reparation payments in favor of Hungary, while 2/3 of Hungary’s debt was due for the Soviet Union.²⁷⁵ This was the insistence of the Soviet side for a fixed amount to be paid; as the Red Army swept through Hungary, they also

elements in the country even after the German occupation. James Felak, “Relations between the Communist and Social Democratic Parties in Hungary in 1945,” *East European Quarterly* XXXIV, no. 1 (March 2000), 105.

²⁷³ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. December 24, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc. 866.

²⁷⁴ They were to be taken prisoner by the American forces in Salzburg, and later given back to Hungary as war criminals. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 373.

²⁷⁵ The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan). November 2, 1944, *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.850.

dismantled factories and stole other industrial materiel.²⁷⁶ The US wanted this wholesale loot to amount to part of the reparations the Soviets demanded. The US logic ran that the fewer reparations Hungary had to pay, the less economically dependent the country would be on the Soviet Union.²⁷⁷ In early November, the American State Department forwarded an aide-mémoire to the American Embassy in Moscow where, in the context of the armistice terms for Hungary, he set out the American aims in post-war Central Europe. The early recovery and general economic stability of Europe were within the sphere of American interests. Yet, he suggested keeping the option of accepting payment of 300 million dollars by Hungary for reparations, 200 million of which would be paid to the Soviet Union, with the remainder sum to other Allied states claiming compensation against Hungary.²⁷⁸

The Soviet involvement in Hungary also aimed to start in the economy. This was a consistent Soviet formulation that had several stages for the completion of *Sovietization* in an occupied country in the post-war period. The Soviets would align the economy of the country with that of itself at the end of the process through naturalization and state interference in the economy. However, the order of *Sovietization* in Hungary differed from those in Bulgaria and Romania.²⁷⁹ In the latter countries, the complete Soviet

²⁷⁶ The Potsdam Declaration gave the Soviet Union the authorization to take away German assets in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Austria as part of the war payments.

²⁷⁷ László Borhi, "Soviet Expansionism or American Imperialism?" in *20th century Hungary and the Great Powers*, ed. by Ignác Romsics (New Jersey: Atlantic Research Publications, 1992), 234. Between the two wars, the U.S. investment in Hungary did not amount to much as in the case for the East Central Europe. However, the biggest economic investment belonged to Standard Oil (58\$ out of 100\$ in total investments). See: László Borhi, "From the Prehistory of the Cold War (Hungary and the United States 1944-49)," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 35, no. 1 (1989), 220.

²⁷⁸ The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan). November 2, 1944. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol III, doc. 850. These other states were to be Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

²⁷⁹ Borhi, "From the Prehistory of the Cold War," 248.

control of the national economy was followed by the dominance in the political sphere; whereas, in Hungary, the eradication of elements of political opposition came first.

As the American ambassador in Moscow put it, “whoever controlled reparations would control the Hungarian economy,” hence the Soviet dominance and insistence on exacting reparations.²⁸⁰ The same line of realizing Soviet objectives was followed in Hungary, too. This started off with the signing of the Soviet – Hungarian economic agreement on August 27, 1945, whose aim was to provide Hungary with raw materials in exchange for its export of food and manufactured goods. This, along with the reparation payments, continued until 1948; by that time the Hungarian economy had become virtually dependent on the Soviet Union.²⁸¹ The Soviet economic control dwarfed the former German control in Hungary. The confiscation of the Hungarian industry was very organized and soon after the war’s end, the Soviet Union put what was not confiscated under its direct economic control and ensured in such a way that the remaining Hungarian industry produced solely for the Soviets.

Although the Americans were not intending to receive reparations from Hungary, they were insistent on official American participation in the Allied Control Commission (ACC) on reparations. Beyond that, the Control Commission in Hungary, which was under the direct Soviet control, was restricting the American and British movement in Hungary, and not informing them on the Commission decisions and policy directives

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 235.

²⁸¹ The sudden cut in reparations Hungary had to pay to the Soviet Union emanated from the installment of a fully pro-Soviet government in Budapest. With the full political loyalty came the Kremlin reward in the form of reducing the remaining debt into half. Max, *the United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary*, 62.

sufficiently.²⁸² Molotov did not give any assurances on either, stating that the Commission reserved the right to inform the other Allies whenever the military situation permitted. His ultimate point was that the freedom of action of the Soviet command could not be restricted.²⁸³

The ACC, which was technically controlled by the Soviet government, channeled all the Hungarian communications through itself. The Commission was the ultimate arbiter between Hungary and any other Allied powers and it maintained its position until the Peace Treaty became valid on September 15, 1947. The Prime Ministry and Foreign Affairs tried to bypass it whenever possible. The chairman of the ACC was Marshal Voroshilov but he was away in Moscow for long periods of time. In his stead, the most discernible political figure was Georgy Pushkin, the political adviser to Voroshilov. The British representative was Alvary Gascoigne, who kept the UK away from the Hungarian internal affairs.²⁸⁴ The US representative in Hungary, Arthur Schoenfeld, came to his post on the day of the signing of the Hungarian armistice, January 20, 1945, and he was not part of the ACC. Schoenfeld was instructed to impress upon the Hungarians and others that the diplomatic relations between the USA and Hungary were to begin only when the peace treaty was concluded.²⁸⁵ Germany's allies in the war had no official representatives over in the US, and this lack of direct communication and

²⁸² The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. January 8, 1945. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.887.

²⁸³ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State. January 9, 1945. *FRUS*, the British Commonwealth and Europe, vol. III, doc.890 The reserved Soviet attitude also stemmed from the fact that the United States and Great Britain did not consult or inform the Soviets on their post-war operations in Italy. The famous 'Hyde Park Declaration' of September 26, 1944, which gave the Italian people restricted autonomy did not make a single mention of the Soviet Union. Elisabeth Barker, "British Policy towards Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary 1944-1946," in *Communist Power in Europe, 1944-1949*, ed. by Martin McCauley (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), 202.

²⁸⁴ Roman, *Hungary and the Victor Powers*, 72.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

isolation worried the US that the Soviet influence would increase in East-Central Europe in the post-war period. Thus, American representatives were sent off to Budapest and Sofia.²⁸⁶ Likewise, the US government asked for non-diplomatic observers to the US from the former German satellites, but the Soviets interceded and instructed the Hungarian government that it was only through ACC that Hungary could maintain its external communications.²⁸⁷ As an extent of the political isolation of Hungary from the West, the ACC consistently turned down the US offers for a joint program that would put the Hungarian economy back on its feet. The Soviet explanation for the rejection was that Hungary was apt to carry out their economic recovery.²⁸⁸ The Soviet strategy in the occupied countries followed this persistence in the exclusion of the Western Allies; the Soviet authorities exerted full political, economic, and social control over Hungary.

6.4. The 'Peace' Terms for Hungary

The Peace Conference took place on July 29, 1946 in Paris. The Big Three made all the decisions just as it was after the First World War; the defeated nations were allowed to

²⁸⁶ Bucharest did not receive an US representative as the State Department believed Romania did not establish a government according to the Yalta principles. *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁸⁷ Such an allied control commission did not only pertain to Hungary. As a matter of fact, such commissions were set up in Italy in November 1943, in Finland and Romania in September 1944, and in Bulgaria in October 1944. Such a commission mainly directed the political affairs in those countries and saw to the implementation of the armistice terms. In the case of Italy, both the British and the Americans immediately took full control of the ACC, excluding the Soviet Union from its administration. The ACC in Italy was supervised by the Mediterranean Allied High Command up until 1947. When the Americans and the British protested the Hungarian ACC being under heavy Soviet dominance, the Soviets referred to the so called 'Italian formula' and refused to give equal partnership to the other Allied powers. Max, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary*, 13.

²⁸⁸ Stephen Kertesz, "Soviet and Western Politics in Hungary, 1944-1947," *The Review of Politics* 14, no. 1 (January 1952), 63.

attend the conference that would determine the political fate of their countries. Hungary had to give up all the territorial gains it had achieved with the German help. However, the Hungarian delegation still ‘dared’ to bargain a revision of Trianon. It was the Hungarian luck that in addition to the pre-1938 borders they only had to give Bratislava bridgehead to Czechoslovakia.²⁸⁹ The Czech government demanded the expulsion of some 200,000 Hungarians in the region to make Czechoslovakia ethnically homogenous. The Hungarian protests were questioned by the Czech foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, who asked, “who won this war? The United Nations or Hungary?”²⁹⁰ Ultimately, the Czech proposal would be turned down based on the ethnic principle.²⁹¹

As for Transylvania, which was the biggest Hungarian national claim and territorial desire, the Soviet Union extended its full support for the Romanian claim on the entire territory. When the Red Army with the Romanian forces took the northern Transylvania in 1944, the control of the region was in the hands of the Soviet military government. The Soviets’ siding with Romania was based on a political calculation that if Hungary left empty-handed on such a major territorial dispute, this would lead to diminishing leverage of the Smallholders’ Party –the dominant political party in Hungary.²⁹² Stalin took advantage of the frailty of both sides on the Transylvanian question just like Hitler did in his prime. A similar case was that of Bulgaria. Being the only pro-Axis country that retained some territory, Bulgaria also had an ethnic-based claim on southern

²⁸⁹ Borsody, *the Triumph of Tyranny*, 221.

²⁹⁰ John C. Campbell, “The European Territorial Settlement,” 211.

²⁹¹ Edvard Beneš, the president of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, voiced the Czech guarantees of loyalty to the Soviet Union back in 1943 at a meeting with Stalin. Beneš agreed with the Soviet leader on almost every subject. On Hungary, Benes stated that Czechoslovakia should adopt the Soviet policy; a revolution to take place in Hungary was necessary so that feudalism would be destroyed. As the first step towards this goal, he expressed that Hungary should be occupied by the Red Army. Nadeau, *Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt Divide Europe*, 56-57.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Dobrudja, which it had retained with Hitler's help. However, Bulgaria had the backing of the Soviet Union. It was Hungary alone that faced a direct hit with no diplomatic consolation at the peace table. Romania and Bulgaria joined the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany in the last phase of the war. Hungary was Hitler's last fighting ally, therefore it received no sympathy from the victors.

Immediately after the war, the Hungarian politics continued the multi-party system with a coalition government, yet the foreign affairs were largely conducted by the Smallholders' Party, which was founded as an agrarian-based party but later expanded to include the political center and right.²⁹³ The party followed a pro-western path, specifically appealing to the United States and the United Kingdom. Caught between the Soviet Union and the West, Hungary lost its autonomy to control its foreign affairs once a definitive fall-out between these two camps became apparent. In fact, by 1945 the Soviet Union had under its control the all-important power ministries as well as the security forces and the administration of justice in Eastern Europe –Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. The consolidation of the Soviet power in occupied territories would come to be known as the “salami tactic,” a gradual process, discreet slices one by another.²⁹⁴ The full-scale Communist dominance in Hungary came when Béla Kovács, the general secretary of the Smallholders' Party, was arrested based on charges of reactionary conspiracy in February 1947.²⁹⁵ Three months later, a Communist coup overthrew the Smallholders' Party and its premier, Ferenc Nagy, who was on vacation in

²⁹³ Roman, *Hungary and the Victor Powers*, 4.

²⁹⁴ Michael Dobbs, *Six Months in 1945: FDR, Stalin, Churchill, and Truman –From World War to Cold War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 256.

²⁹⁵ Borsody, *the Triumph of Tyranny*, 224.

Switzerland.²⁹⁶ The newly-installed prime minister from his party was not a popular figure. The real power, however, rested in the hands of Mátyás Rákosi, who was one of the best-known Communist figures in Europe.

²⁹⁶ Instead of returning to the country and face the conspiracy charges, Nagy chose to live in exile. Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The interwar Hungary had many political, economic, and social fluctuations, but these were shadowed by the “Trianon Syndrome,” which set the course for Hungary after the Great War.²⁹⁷ The Hungarian reaction to Trianon was excessively emotional and politically all-consuming. The peaceful revision of the treaty had never been an option, for Hungary aligned itself with countries such as Italy, and later, Germany –countries that were not content with the conclusion of peace after the First World War, either. To make sense of the Hungarian policy decisions and fluctuations during the Second World War, as well as what that war cost to the country, we need to look deeper into Hungary between the wars and the diplomatic commitments and renunciations it had formed all the while fixated on a complete revision of Trianon.

The primary reasons and factors that propelled Hungary to take the course of war on the side of Germany were the political and national resentment Hungary had after Trianon in 1920. The cause for revisionism gained the support of Hungarians from every political spectrum and united them. After the war, the Treaty came back to haunt Hungary as the

²⁹⁷ After the end of the war, the Hungarian borders were back as Trianon dictated. Thus, the syndrome did not lose prominence even after the Second World War.

country essentially had to relent to the re-establishment of pre-1938 borders. Hungary wanted to revise *all* the territories of the old Kingdom, the Hungarian-German bond had come about only because Hitler was able to provide some of these revisions. The fact that Hungary was not able to gain it all and that they were drawn into a war for a country against which they had no territorial demands, frustrated the Hungarian political authorities and people as catastrophes surpassed military victories. Horthy's defection had been the culminating point for the widening rift between Hungary and Germany.

The revisionism of Trianon took place four times and all of them were with the help of Germany. With the Munich Agreement of 1938, Hungary acquired territories from the Slovak territories and Carpatho-Ukraine. With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the rest of Carpatho-Ukraine was transferred to Hungary. The rest of the two territorial gains were the Vienna 'Awards,' by direct arbitration of Germany and Italy.²⁹⁸ The adherence to the Axis policy doubled the territories of Hungary.

Perhaps if the American foreign policy in East-Central Europe was in sync with that of Great Britain, the Soviet spheres of influence could be further back in the east. Could a joint Anglo-American policy convince and induce Stalin to accept pro-Soviet but not communist regimes there? The US Ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, was of the opinion that Stalin would use "strong-arm" methods to establish a Soviet "sphere of influence" in Eastern Europe. Harriman's deputy, George Kennan, agreed that a division

²⁹⁸ Joseph Rotschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38. Rotschild and Wingfield attributes this alignment with the Axis policy to the fanatical Hungarian revisionism; however, they deem it as an anomaly on the claim that Hungary had been an Anglophile country all along. It is true that out of revisionist claims Hungary started a pro-German course of action but the British indifference toward the Hungarian political aims should also be noted to make sense of Hungarian change of camp.

of Europe was bound to happen.²⁹⁹ Moreover, as early as August 1943, a White House file including a “military-strategic estimate” run that the Soviet Russia would occupy a “dominant position” in the anti-Hitler alliance even after the US and Britain opened their long-awaited second front in France. The estimate also stipulated that “without Russia in the war, the Axis cannot be defeated in Europe.”³⁰⁰ Its prediction was that the Soviets would ultimately hold a dominant position in post-war Europe. At the Yalta Conference of 1945 both of the Western leaders were putting emphasis on the independence of nations and the right to self-determination as bound to the Atlantic Charter of 1941.³⁰¹ However, the American side refrained from that commitment in the Western Hemisphere when the mention of the Monroe Doctrine came up and the British would exclude their colonies.

There was a bid for their own spheres of influence among those three Allied leaders and every time the British or the Americans made exceptions for their own cases, they strengthened Stalin’s case for Russian dominance in Eastern Europe. Stalin, however, was not riveted either by the Charter or by any grand political visions for post-war Europe. He referred to those declarations and grand schemes as “algebra” and differentiated them from the “arithmetic” of practical settlements.³⁰² The Yalta Conference did not devote much attention to the Hungarian affairs, and ultimately the questions that seemed to be settled at Yalta on the shape of post-war Europe were left open to interpretation on which none of the Big Three could unanimously agree. The

²⁹⁹ Dobbs, *Six Months in 1945*, 7.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰¹ The Atlantic Charter was born out of a meeting between FDR and Churchill in Newfoundland where the two leaders met and discussed their war aims. In the charter, both parties committed themselves not to seek territorial expansion, but instead pledged to look after the restoration of self-governments for all the occupied countries in the post-war period.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 82.

post-war Hungary took its shape when in 1944 Horthy's delegation faced the Allied-approved Soviet conditions for the armistice. The restoration of 'Trianon' Hungary was among the most striking terms. The Hungarian delegation was not vested with leverage and as a defeated belligerent, Hungary had no other option. The foundation of the Debrecen government was part of Stalin's façade of democracy and this façade was under heavy control of the Soviet occupation forces. Between December 1944 and November 1945, the Provisional Government in Debrecen pursued an economic policy that would better the war-torn Hungary. It approved of a Land Reform Act, which put large estates into state control; the benefitters were the landless peasantry until the collective farms were introduced in the 1950s.³⁰³

The most imperative change Hungary went through after the Second World War is the country's turning into a Soviet satellite state. From a western country on the frontiers of European dominance, Hungary was now a buffer Western country with more of it on the Soviet side. The Soviet occupation of Hungary was 'liberation,' from the 'tragedy' that befell on Hungary. This view was shared by the communist agenda, as well. This way, the country found an opportunity to wash its hands off the Nazi support it sustained throughout the war and with hardly any resistance to the Nazi domination, which is strikingly peculiar. In 1945, Hungary was left with the boundaries of the Treaty of Trianon again, and they still remain unchanged.

³⁰³ Charles Gati, "From Liberation to Revolution, 1945-1956," in *A History of Hungary*, ed. by Peter Sugar et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 370.

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FIGURES

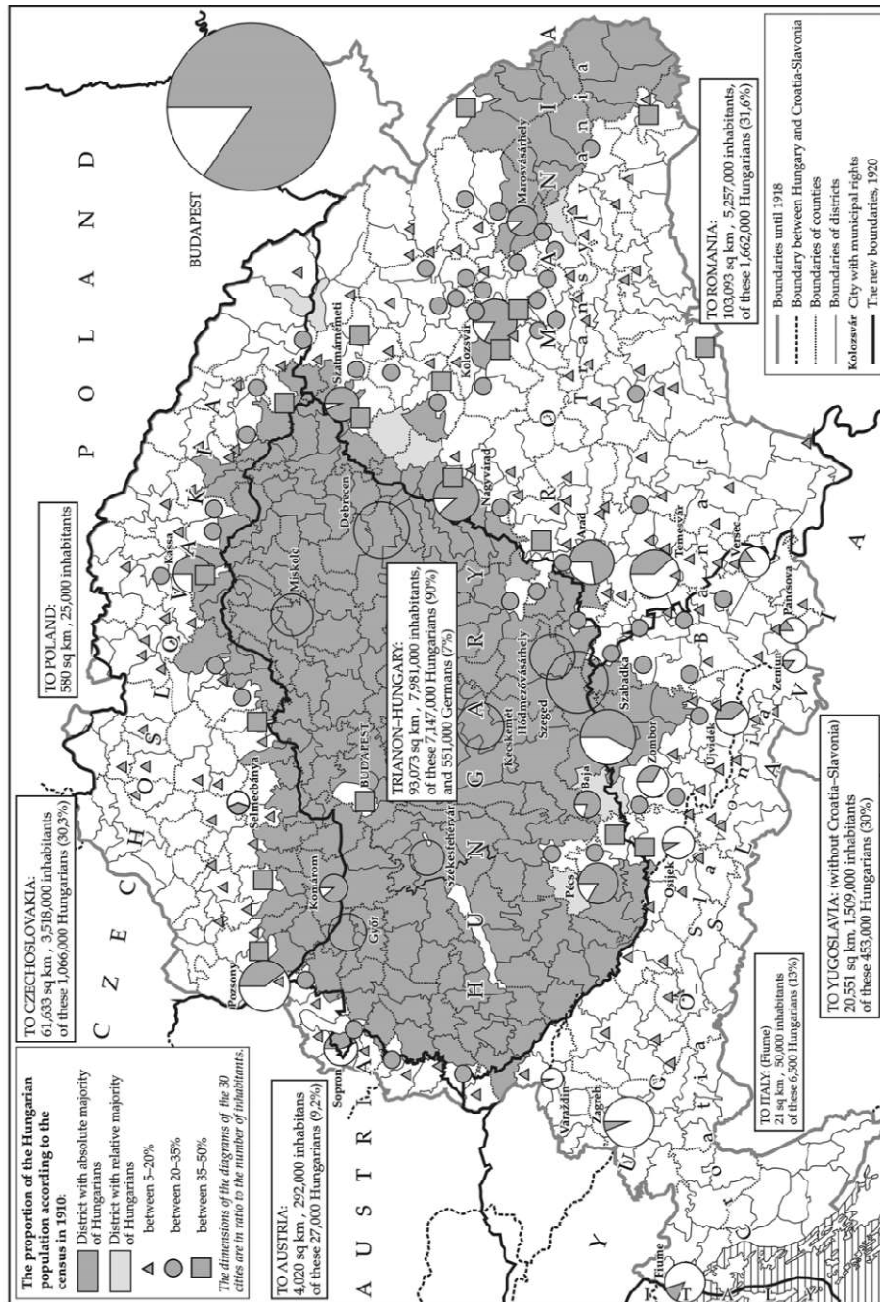


Figure 1: The 'Trianon' Hungary³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Retrieved from: Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 8.



Figure 2: “Nem, nem, soha!”³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Retrieved from: Jeges Ernő, Bibliotheca Nationalis Hungarie (Date: 1926).



Figure 3: Hitler and Horthy³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ Retrieved from: <https://history.info/on-this-day/1957-admiral-horthy-hitlers-ally-adversary/>

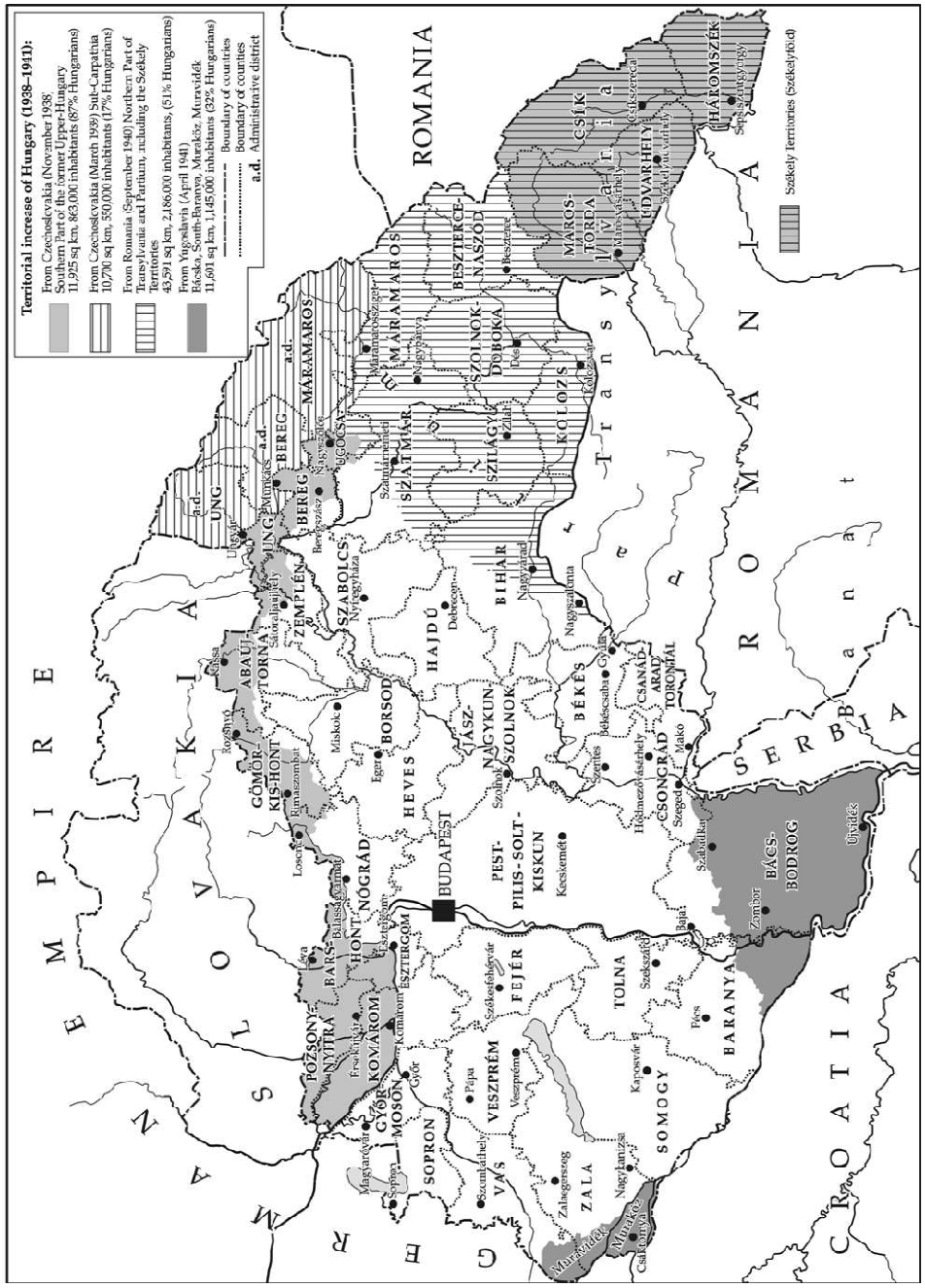


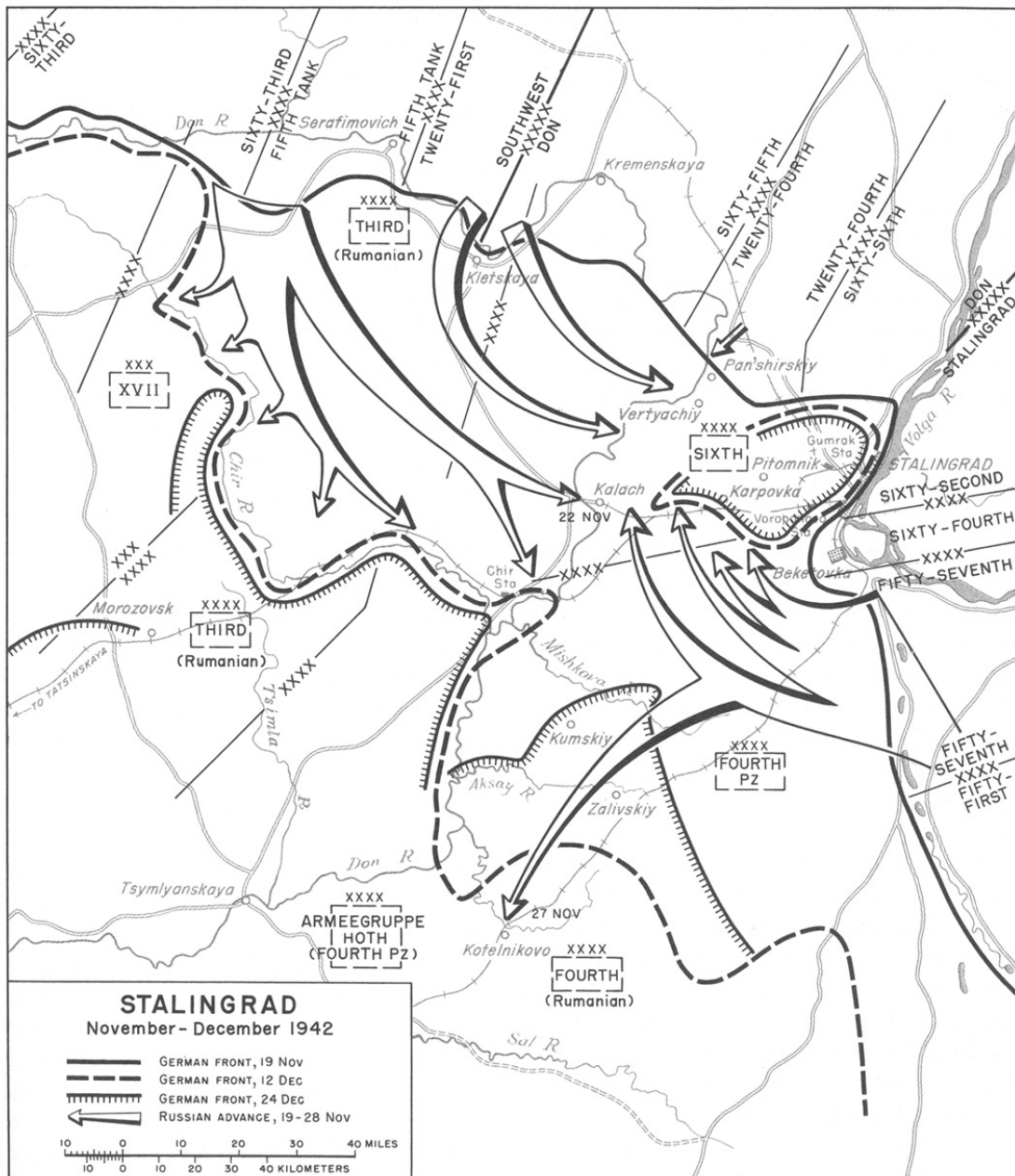
Figure 4: Hungarian territorial gains between 1938-1941³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ Retrieved from: Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 92.



Figure 5: Count Pál Teleki³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Retrieved from: <https://hungarytoday.hu/former-pm-pal-telekis-second-suicide-note-found/>



MAP 4

D. Holmes, Jr.

Figure 6: Disaster at Stalingrad³⁰⁹

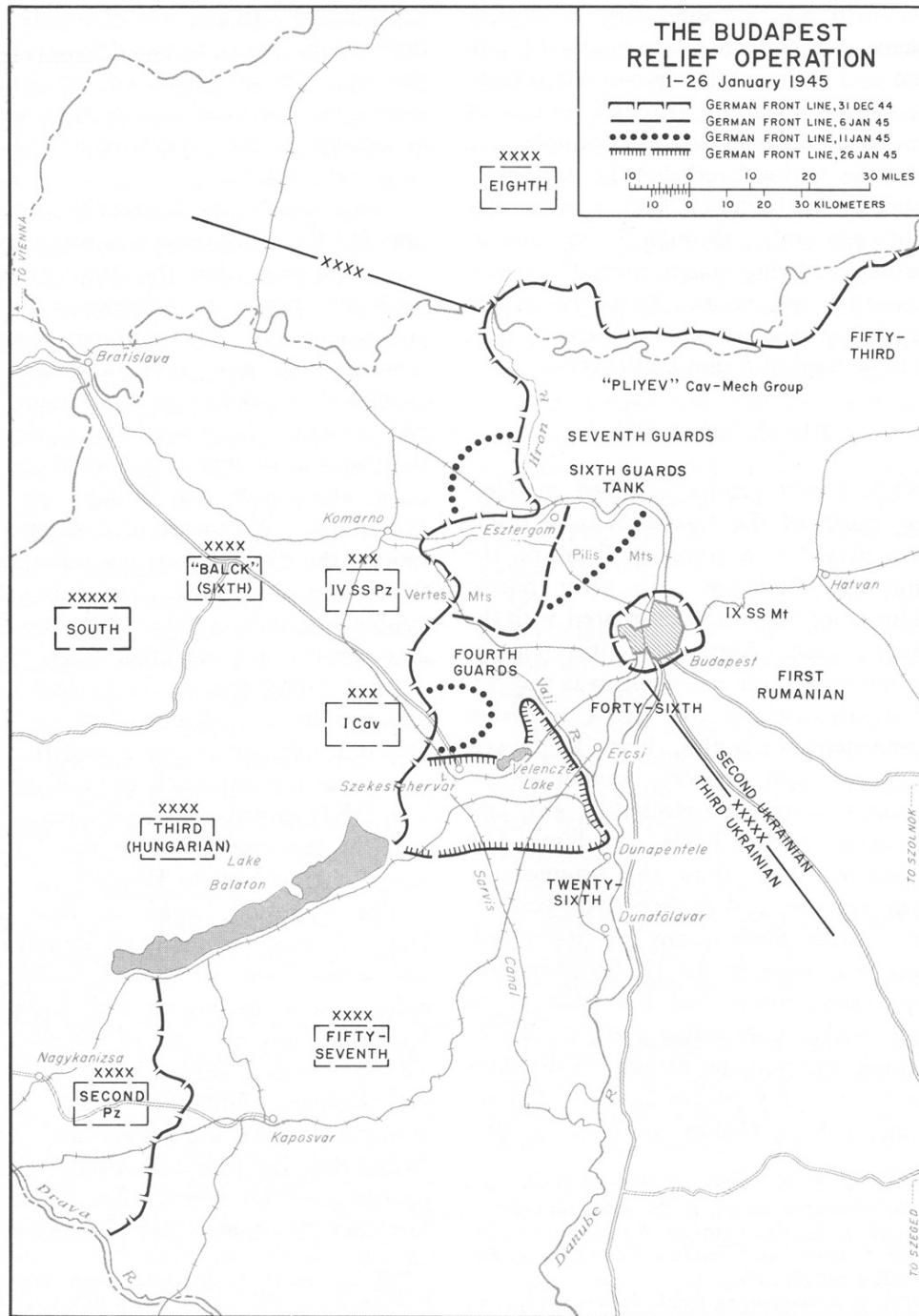
³⁰⁹ Retrieved from: Retrieved from: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: the German Defeat in the East* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1987), 67.

Finish of Hungary, Hitler's Last Major Satellite, in Sight



Figure 7: The Soviet advance on Hungary –Hitler's Last Satellite³¹⁰

³¹⁰ Retrieved from: Los Angeles Times, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection (Date:1944).



MAP 38

Figure 8: Budapest Relief Operation³¹¹

³¹¹ Retrieved from: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: the German Defeat in the East* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1987), 434.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-680-8283A-18A
Foto: Faupel | Oktober 1944

Figure 9: German troops in Budapest, October 1944³¹²

³¹² Tiger II could be seen in the background. Retrieved from: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-680-8283A-18A.



Figure 10: German Panzer, Tiger II, Budapest³¹³

³¹³ Retrieved from: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-680-8282A-06



Figure 11: Present-day Hungary³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Retrieved from: <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/hungary.jpg>