



YDMUN'25

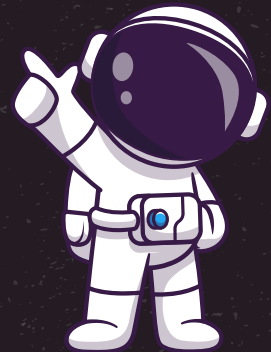


# Study Guide

## LEAGUE OF NATIONS

*Invasion Of The Czechoslovakia (1939)*

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## YDMUN LEAGUE OF NATIONS STUDY GUIDE

### Introduction to the committee

The League of Nations was the first worldwide intergovernmental organisation whose principal mission was to maintain world peace. It was founded on 10 January 1920 by the Paris Peace Conference that ended the First World War. The main organisation ceased operations on 18 April 1946 when many of its components were relocated into the new United Nations (UN) which was created in the aftermath of the Second World War. As the template for modern global governance, the League profoundly shaped the modern world.

The League's primary goals were stated in its eponymous Covenant. They included preventing wars through collective security and disarmament and settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. Its other concerns included labour conditions, just treatment of native inhabitants, human and drug trafficking, the arms trade, global health, prisoners of war, and protection of minorities in Europe. The Covenant of the League of Nations was signed on 28 June 1919 as Part I of the Treaty of Versailles, and it became effective with the rest of the Treaty on 10 January 1920.

At its greatest extent from 28 September 1934 to 23 February 1935, it had 58 members. After some notable successes and some early failures in the 1920s, the League ultimately proved incapable of preventing aggression by the Axis powers in the 1930s. Its credibility was weakened because the United States never joined. Japan and Germany left in 1933, Italy left in 1937, and Spain left in 1939. The Soviet Union only joined in 1934 and was expelled in 1939 after invading Finland.

## Introduction to the Agenda Item

The military occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany began with the German annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938, continued with the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and by the end of 1944 extended to all parts of Czechoslovakia.

Following the *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938 and the Munich Agreement in September of that same year, Adolf Hitler annexed the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia on 1 October, giving Germany control of the extensive Czechoslovak border fortifications in this area. The incorporation of the Sudetenland into Germany left the rest of Czechoslovakia with a largely indefensible northwestern border. Also a Polish-majority borderland region of Trans-Olza which was annexed by Czechoslovakia in 1919, was occupied and annexed by Poland following the two-decade long territorial dispute. Finally the First Vienna Award gave to Hungary the southern territories of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, mostly inhabited by Hungarians.

The Slovak State broke off on 14 March 1939, and Hungary annexed the remainder of Carpathian Ruthenia the following day. On 15 March, during a visit to Berlin, the Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha was coerced into signing away his country's independence. On 16 March, Hitler proclaimed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia from Prague Castle, leaving Hácha as the nominal, but almost powerless, State President. Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Wehrmacht, and real power was vested in Hitler's personal representative, the Reichsprotektor.

During the occupation, between 294,000 to 320,000 citizens were murdered, the majority of them Jews. Reprisal killings were especially harsh after the assassination of Reinhard

Heydrich, including the infamous Lidice massacre. Large numbers were drafted for slave labour in Germany.

## General Overview

### **The Economic Crisis in Germany**

Hitler's interest in Czechoslovakia was largely economic. Germany had the second-largest economy in the world, but German agriculture was not capable of feeding the population, and there was also a lack of many raw materials, which had to be imported. The Four-Year Plan that Hitler had launched in September 1936 to have the German economy ready for a "total war" by 1940 had seriously strained the German economy by 1937 as German government was forced to use up its foreign exchange reserves both to feed its own people and to import various raw materials to achieve the ambitious armament goals of the Four Year Plan. Though the Four Year Plan aimed at autarky, there were certain raw materials such as high-grade iron, oil, chrome, nickel, tungsten, and bauxite that Germany did not have and had to be imported. The need to import food and raw materials made Germany into Europe's second largest importer, being exceeded only by Great Britain. Moreover, hundreds of millions of *Reichsmarks* were spent on various armament works such as the *Reichswerke* steel complex, an expensive program to develop synthetic fuel, and various other equally expensive chemical and aluminum programs, all of which strained the German economy. The Great Depression was an era of trade wars and protectionism, which imposed limits on Germany's ability to export and thus earn foreign exchange. Moreover, the Four Year Plan with its aim of autarky led to Germany increasing its tariffs, which led other nations to do

likewise in retaliation. The British historian Richard Overy wrote the huge demands of the Four Year Plan "...could not be fully met by a policy of import substitution and industrial rationalisation", thus leading Hitler to decide in November 1937 that to stay ahead in the arms race with the other powers that Germany had to seize Czechoslovakia in the near-future.

At the Hossbach conference on 5 November 1937, Hitler announced that seizing Czechoslovakia would increase the supply of food under German control, which in turn would lessen the need to import food, thereby freeing up more foreign exchange to import raw materials necessary for the Four Year Plan's targets. The Hossbach conference was largely taken up with an extended discussion about the necessity of bringing areas adjunct to Germany under German economic control, by force if necessary, as Hitler argued that this was the best way to win the arms race. Hitler stated: "areas producing raw materials can be more usefully sought in Europe, in immediate proximity to the *Reich*". Overy wrote about Hitler's attitude to the *Reich*'s economic problems that: "He simply saw war instrumentally, as the Japanese had done in Manchuria, as a way to expand the German resource base and to secure it against other powers".

At the time, Czechoslovakia had Europe's 7th largest economy, and easily the most modern, developed, and industrialized economy in Eastern Europe. The former Austrian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia that now comprise the modern Czech Republic had been the industrial heartland of the Austrian empire, where the majority of the arms for the Imperial Austrian Army were manufactured, most notably at the Škoda Works. One consequence of this legacy was that Czechoslovakia was the only nation in Eastern Europe besides the Soviet Union that manufactured its own weapons instead of importing them, and Czechoslovakia was the world's 7th largest manufacturer of arms, making Czechoslovakia an important player in the global arms trade.

## **Demands for Sudeten autonomy**

Sudeten German pro-Nazi leader Konrad Henlein offered the Sudeten German Party (SdP) as the agent for Hitler's campaign. Henlein met with Hitler in Berlin on 28 March 1938, where he was instructed to raise demands unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government led by president Edvard Beneš. On 24 April, the SdP issued the Karlsbader Programm, demanding autonomy for the Sudetenland and the freedom to profess National Socialist ideology. If Henlein's demands were granted, the Sudetenland would be an autonomous state aligned with Nazi Germany.

## **Munich Agreement**

As the tepid reaction to the German *Anschluss* with Austria had shown, the governments of France, the United Kingdom and Czechoslovakia were set on avoiding war at any cost. The French government did not wish to face Germany alone and took its lead from the British government, led by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. He contended that Sudeten German grievances were justified and believed that Hitler's intentions were limited. That made Britain and France advise Czechoslovakia to concede to the German demands. Beneš resisted, and on 20 May 1938, a partial mobilisation was under way in response to the possible German invasion. It is suggested that the mobilisation could have been launched on the basis of Soviet misinformation about Germany being on the verge of invasion, which aimed to trigger war in Western Europe.

On 30 May, Hitler signed a secret directive for war against Czechoslovakia to begin no later than 1 October.

In the meantime, the British government demanded for Beneš to request a mediator. Not wishing to sever his government's ties with Western Europe, Beneš reluctantly accepted. The British appointed Lord Runciman and instructed him to persuade Beneš to agree to a plan acceptable to the Sudeten Germans. On 2 September, Beneš submitted the Fourth Plan, which granted nearly all of the demands of the Karlsbader Programm. Intent on obstructing conciliation, however, the SdP held demonstrations that provoked the police in Ostrava on 7 September. The Sudeten Germans broke off negotiations on 13 September, and violence and disruption ensued. As Czechoslovak troops attempted to restore order, Henlein flew to Germany, and on 15 September, he issued a proclamation demanding the takeover of the Sudetenland by Germany.



The same day, Hitler met with Chamberlain and demanded the swift takeover of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany under threat of war. Czechoslovakia, Hitler claimed, was slaughtering the Sudeten Germans. Chamberlain referred the demand to the British and

French governments, both of which accepted. The Czechoslovak government resisted by arguing that Hitler's proposal would ruin the nation's economy and ultimately lead to German control of all of Czechoslovakia. The United Kingdom and France issued an ultimatum and made a French commitment to Czechoslovakia contingent upon its acceptance. On 21 September, Czechoslovakia capitulated. The next day, however, Hitler added new demands that insisted for the claims of Poland and Hungary to be satisfied as well. Romania was also invited to share in the division of Carpathian Ruthenia but refused because it was an ally of Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak capitulation precipitated an outburst of national indignation. In demonstrations and rallies, Czechs and Slovaks called for a strong military government to defend the integrity of the state. A new cabinet, under General Jan Syrový, was installed, and on 23 September 1938, a decree of general mobilization was issued. The Czechoslovak Army was modern, had an excellent system of frontier fortifications and was prepared to fight. The Soviet Union announced its willingness to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance. Beneš, however, refused to go to war without the support of the Western powers.

Hitler gave a speech in Berlin on 26 September 1938 and declared that the Sudetenland was "the last territorial demand I have to make in Europe". He also stated that he had told Chamberlain, "I have assured him further that, and this I repeat here before you, once this issue has been resolved, there will no longer be any further territorial problems for Germany in Europe!"

On 28 September, Chamberlain appealed to Hitler for a conference. Hitler met the next day at Munich with the chiefs of governments of France, Italy and Britain. The Czechoslovak government was neither invited nor consulted. On 29 September, the Munich Agreement was signed by Germany, Italy, France and Britain. The Czechoslovak government capitulated on



30 September, despite the army's opposition, and agreed to abide by the agreement, which stipulated that Czechoslovakia must cede Sudetenland to Germany. The German occupation of the Sudetenland would be completed by 10 October. An international commission representing Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia would supervise a plebiscite to determine the final frontier. Britain and France promised to join in an international guarantee of the new frontiers against unprovoked aggression. Germany and Italy, however, would not join in the guarantee until the Polish and Hungarian minority problems were settled.

## First Vienna Award

In early November 1938, under the First Vienna Award, which was a result of the Munich agreement, Czechoslovakia—which had failed to reach a compromise with Hungary and Poland—had to cede after the arbitration of Germany and Italy awarded southern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary, while Poland invaded Trans-Olza territory shortly after.

Soon after Munich, 115,000 Czechs and 30,000 Germans fled to the remaining rump of Czechoslovakia. According to the Institute for Refugee Assistance, the actual count of refugees on 1 March 1939 stood at almost 150,000.

On 4 December 1938, there were elections in Reichsgau Sudetenland, in which 97.32% of the adult population voted for the National Socialist Party. About 500,000 Sudeten Germans joined the National Socialist Party, which was 17.34% of the German population in Sudetenland (the average National Socialist Party participation in Nazi Germany was 7.85%). This means the Sudetenland was the most pro-Nazi region in Nazi Germany. Because of their knowledge of the Czech language, many Sudeten Germans were employed in the

administration of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and in Nazi organizations such as the *Gestapo*.

## Second Republic (October 1938 to March 1939)

The greatly weakened Czechoslovak Republic was forced to grant major concessions to the non-Czechs. The executive committee of the Slovak People's Party met at Žilina on 5 October 1938, and with the acquiescence of all Slovak parties except the Social Democrats formed an autonomous Slovak government under Jozef Tiso. Similarly, the two major factions in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, the Russophiles and Ukrainophiles, agreed on the establishment of an autonomous government, which was constituted on 8 October. Reflecting the spread of modern Ukrainian national consciousness, the pro-Ukrainian faction, led by Avhustyn Voloshyn, gained control of the local government and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was renamed Carpatho-Ukraine. In 1939, during the occupation, the Nazis banned Russian ballet.

A last-ditch attempt to save Czechoslovakia from total ruin was made by the British and French governments, who on 27 January 1939, concluded an agreement of financial assistance with the Czechoslovak government. In this agreement, the British and French governments undertook to lend the Czechoslovak government £8 million and make a gift of £4 million. Part of the funds were allocated to help resettle Czechs and Slovaks who had fled from territories lost to Germany, Hungary, and Poland in the Munich Agreement or the Vienna Arbitration Award.

In November 1938, Emil Hácha, who succeeded Beneš, was elected president of the federated Second Republic, renamed Czecho-Slovakia and consisting of three parts: Bohemia and Moravia, Slovakia, and Carpatho-Ukraine. Lacking its natural frontier and having lost its costly system of border fortification, the new state was militarily indefensible. Without the

natural defensive barrier of the mountains of the Sudetenland, Hácha carried out a foreign policy that was slavishly pro-German as he felt this was the best way to preserve his nation's independence.

In late 1938-early 1939, the continuing economic crisis caused by problems of rearmament, especially the shortage of foreign hard currencies needed to pay for raw materials Germany lacked together with reports from Hermann Göring that the Four Year Plan was hopelessly behind schedule forced Hitler in January 1939 to reluctantly order major defense cuts with the Wehrmacht having its steel allocations cut by 30%, aluminum 47%, cement 25%, rubber 14% and copper 20%. On 30 January 1939, Hitler made his "Export or die!" speech calling for a German economic offensive or "export battle" to use Hitler's term to increase German foreign exchange holdings to pay for raw materials for the Four Year Plan without cutting back on food imports. Hitler's wish to occupy Czechoslovakia was primarily caused by the foreign exchange crisis as Germany had run down its foreign exchange reserves by early 1939, and Germany urgently needed to seize the gold of the Czechoslovak central bank to continue the Four Year Plan. On 8 March 1939, Hitler met with Wilhelm Keppler, the NSDAP's economic expert, where he spoke about his wish to occupy Czecho-Slovakia for economic reasons, saying that Germany needed its raw materials and industries.

Hitler totally ignored the agreements of the Munich Agreement and scheduled a German invasion of Bohemia and Moravia for the morning of 15 March. In the interim, he negotiated with the Slovak People's Party and with Hungary to prepare the dismemberment of the republic before the invasion. On 13 March, he invited Tiso to Berlin and on 14 March, the Slovak Diet convened and unanimously declared Slovak independence. Carpatho-Ukraine also declared independence but Hungarian troops occupied and annexed it on 15 March and a small part of eastern Slovakia as well on 23 March.

## 14 March

After the secession of Slovakia and Ruthenia, British Ambassador to Czechoslovakia Basil Newton advised President Hácha to meet with Hitler. When Hácha arrived in Berlin on 14 March, he met with the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop prior to meeting with Hitler. Von Ribbentrop testified at the Nuremberg trials that during this meeting, Hácha had told him that "he wanted to place the fate of the Czech State in the Führer's hands." Hácha later met with Hitler, where Hitler gave the Czech President two options: cooperate with Germany, in which case the "entry of German troops would take place in a tolerable manner" and "permit Czechoslovakia a generous life of her own, autonomy and a degree of national freedom..." or face a scenario in which "resistance would be broken by force of arms, using all means." Minutes of the conversation noted that for Hácha this was the most difficult decision of his life but believed that in only a few years this decision would be comprehensible and in 50 years would probably be regarded as a blessing.

According to Joachim Fest, Hácha suffered a heart attack induced by Hermann Göring's threat to bomb the capital and by four o'clock he contacted Prague, effectively "signing Czechoslovakia away" to Germany. Göring acknowledged making the threat to the British ambassador to Germany, Nevile Henderson, but said that the threat came as a warning because the Czech government, after already agreeing to German occupation, could not guarantee that the Czech army would not fire on the advancing Germans. Göring, however, does not mention that Hácha had a heart attack because of his threat.

## 15-16 March

On the morning of 15 March, German troops entered the remaining Czech parts of Czechoslovakia, meeting practically no resistance (the only instance of organized resistance took place in Místek where an infantry company commanded by Karel Pavlík fought invading German troops). The Hungarian invasion of Carpatho-Ukraine encountered resistance but the Hungarian army quickly crushed it. On 16 March, Hitler went to the Czech lands and from Prague Castle proclaimed the German protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The British historian Victor Rothwell wrote that the Czechoslovak reserves of gold and hard currency seized in March 1939 were "invaluable in staving off Germany's foreign exchange crisis". In addition, the Germans seized all of the factories for making weapons, mines that provided crucial raw materials for the armament program of the Four Year Plan and a "huge weapons haul, including nearly 500 tanks and nearly 1600 aircraft".

Besides violating his promises at Munich, the annexation of the rest of Czechoslovakia was, unlike Hitler's previous actions, not described in *Mein Kampf*. After having repeatedly stated that he was interested only in pan-Germanism, the unification of ethnic Germans into one *Reich*, Germany had now conquered seven million Czechs. Hitler's proclamation creating the protectorate on 16 March claimed that "Bohemia and Moravia have for thousands of years belonged to the *Lebensraum* of the German people". British public opinion changed drastically after the invasion. Chamberlain realised that the Munich Agreement had meant nothing to Hitler. Chamberlain told the British public on 17 March during a speech in Birmingham that Hitler was attempting "to dominate the world by force"

## WW2

The Arsenal of the *Reich*

Shortly before World War II, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. Its territory was divided into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the newly declared Slovak State and the short-lived Republic of Carpathian Ukraine. While much of former Czechoslovakia came under the control of Nazi Germany, Hungarian forces swiftly overran the Carpathian Ukraine. Hungary annexed some areas ( Southern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia) in the autumn of 1938. Poland reclaimed Zaolzie previously annexed by the Czechs during the Polish-Soviet war in 1920. The Zaolzie region became part of Nazi Germany after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939.

The German economy—burdened by heavy militarisation—urgently needed foreign currency. Setting up an artificially high exchange rate between the Czechoslovak *koruna* and the *Reichsmark* brought consumer goods to Germans (and soon created shortages in the Czech lands).

Czechoslovakia had fielded a modern army of 35 divisions and was a major manufacturer of machine guns, tanks, and artillery, most of them assembled in the Škoda factory in Plzeň. Many Czech factories continued to produce Czech designs until converted to German designs. Czechoslovakia also had other major manufacturing companies. Entire steel and chemical factories were moved from Czechoslovakia and reassembled in Linz (which incidentally remains a heavily industrialized area of Austria). In a speech delivered in the Reichstag, Hitler stressed the military importance of occupation, noting that by occupying Czechoslovakia, Germany gained 2,175 field cannons, 469 tanks, 500 anti-aircraft artillery pieces, 43,000 machine guns, 1,090,000 military rifles, 114,000 pistols, about a billion rounds of ammunition and three million anti-aircraft shells. This amount of weapons would be sufficient to arm about half of the then Wehrmacht. Czechoslovak weaponry later played a major part in the German conquests of Poland (1939) and France (1940).

Heydrich during his time as *Reichsprotektor* brought about increases in rations for workers in the armaments industry, improved welfare services, free shoes and for a short time, a five-day work week as Saturday was made a holiday. The National Union of Employees was remolded in the style of the Nazi pseudo-union, the German Labour Front, to provide free sports events, films, concerts and plays for the workers. Heydrich sought to portray himself as the friend of the Czech working class, even meeting a group of selected Czech workers on 24 October 1941 in a photo-op to show his supposed concern for the Czech workers. Heydrich cynically called his policy "optical effects" as he believed that mere gestures such as free showings of films at the local cinemas and free sports matches could win the support of the working class and increase productivity in the war industries. However, inflation was rampant and wage increases failed to keep up with the cost of living, causing the workers to frequently grumble about their conditions.

## Czechoslovak resistance



The relatives of Czech paratroopers Jan Kubiš and Josef Valčík and their fellows, in total 254 people, were executed en masse on 24 October 1942 in Mauthausen concentration camp.

Beneš—the leader of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile—and František Moravec—head of Czechoslovak military intelligence—organized and coordinated a resistance network.

Hácha, Prime Minister Alois Eliáš, and the Czechoslovak resistance acknowledged Beneš's leadership. Active collaboration between London and the Czechoslovak home front was maintained throughout the war years. The most important event of the resistance was Operation Anthropoid, the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, SS leader Heinrich Himmler's deputy and the then Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Infuriated, Hitler ordered the arrest and execution of 10,000 randomly selected Czechs. Over 10,000 were arrested, and at least 1,300 were executed. According to one estimate, 5,000 were killed in reprisals. The assassination resulted in one of the most well-known reprisals of the war. The Nazis completely destroyed the villages of Lidice and Ležáky; all men over 16 years from the village were murdered, and the rest of the population was sent to Nazi concentration camps where many women and nearly all the children were killed.

The Czechoslovak resistance comprised four main groups:

- The army command coordinated with a multitude of spontaneous groupings to form the Defense of the Nation (*Obrana národa*, ON) with branches in Britain and France. Czechoslovak units and formations with Czechs (c. 65–70%), and Slovaks (c. 30%) served with the Polish Army (Czechoslovak Legion), the French Army, the Royal Air Force, the British Army (the 1st Czechoslovak Armoured Brigade), and the Red Army (I Czechoslovak Corps). Two thousand eighty-eight Czechs and 401 Slovaks fought in 11th Infantry Battalion-East alongside the British during the war in areas such as North Africa and Palestine. Among others, Czech fighter pilot, Sergeant Josef František was one of the most successful fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain.



- Beneš's collaborators, led by Prokop Drtina [cs], created the Political Center (*Politické ústředí, PÚ*). The PÚ was nearly destroyed by arrests in November 1939, after which younger politicians took control.
- Social democrats and leftist intellectuals, in association with such groups as trade unions and educational institutions, constituted the Committee of the Petition that We Remain Faithful (*Petiční výbor Věrní zůstaneme, PVVZ*).
- The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) was the fourth major resistance group. The KSČ had been one of over 20 political parties in the democratic First Republic, but it had never gained sufficient votes to unsettle the democratic government. After the Munich Agreement, the leadership of the KSČ moved to Moscow and the party went underground. Until 1943, however, KSČ resistance was weak. The 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, had left the KSČ in disarray. But ever faithful to the Soviet line, the KSČ began a more active struggle against the Germans after Operation Barbarossa, Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.



## The names of executed Czechs, 21 October 1944

The democratic groups—ON, PÚ, and PVVZ—united in early 1940 and formed the Central Committee of the Home Resistance (*Ústřední výbor odboje domácího*, ÚVOD). Involved primarily in intelligence gathering, the ÚVOD cooperated with a Soviet intelligence organization in Prague. Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the democratic groups attempted to create a united front that would include the KSČ. Heydrich's appointment in the fall thwarted these efforts. By mid-1942, the Germans had succeeded in exterminating the most experienced elements of the Czechoslovak resistance forces.

Czechoslovak forces regrouped in 1942–1943. The Council of the Three (R3)—in which the communist underground was also represented—emerged as the focal point of the resistance. The R3 prepared to assist the liberating armies of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. In cooperation with Red Army partisan units, the R3 developed a guerrilla structure.

Guerrilla activity intensified with a rising number of parachuted units in 1944, leading to the establishment of partisan groups such as 1st Czechoslovak Partisan Brigade of Jan Žižka, Jan Kozina Brigade or Master Jan Hus Brigade, and especially after the formation of a provisional Czechoslovak government in Košice on 4 April 1945. "National committees" took over the administration of towns as the Germans were expelled. More than 4,850 such committees were formed between 1944 and the end of the war under the supervision of the Red Army. On 5 May, a national uprising began spontaneously in Prague, and the newly formed Czech National Council (cs) almost immediately assumed leadership of the revolt. Over 1,600 barricades were erected throughout the city, and some 30,000 Czech men and women battled for three days against 40,000 German troops backed by tanks, aircraft and artillery. On 8 May, the German *Wehrmacht* capitulated; Soviet troops arrived on 9 May.

## Major Parties Involved

### Nazi Germany

Under Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany was the primary aggressor. Driven by expansionist and nationalist ideologies, Germany first annexed the Sudetenland through the Munich Agreement in 1938, then occupied the remainder of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Germany justified its actions by claiming to protect ethnic Germans, but its broader goal was the dismantling of Czechoslovakia and the expansion of the Third Reich. Hitler's actions violated the Munich Agreement and international law, challenging the League's authority and the principle of collective security.

### Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia, the victim of the aggression, was a democratic state composed of various ethnic groups, including Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, and others. The loss of the Sudetenland and the forced cessions to Hungary and Poland destabilized the country. In March 1939, Slovakia declared independence under German influence, and the rest of the country was occupied by Nazi forces. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile, later formed in London, sought international support and legitimacy during the war years.

## United Kingdom and France

The UK and France were signatories of the Munich Agreement and initially supported the policy of appeasement, believing it would prevent another major war. Their willingness to pressure Czechoslovakia into territorial concessions without its participation in negotiations revealed their desire to avoid conflict at nearly any cost. However, Germany's further occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939 led both countries to realize the failure of appeasement, and they began to shift toward a more confrontational stance against Nazi aggression.

## Italy

Fascist Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, played a mediating role during the Munich Conference, positioning itself as a diplomatic actor despite its own aggressive ambitions. Italy supported Germany's goals to a large extent and aligned with it under the Axis Powers. Italy's involvement demonstrated the fragility of European diplomacy at the time, as major fascist powers collaborated to reshape the continent's political order.

## Hungary and Poland

Both Hungary and Poland opportunistically took advantage of Czechoslovakia's weakened position following the Munich Agreement. Through the First Vienna Award, Hungary received southern Slovak and Carpathian territories, while Poland annexed the Zaolzie region. These actions contributed to the further

fragmentation and vulnerability of Czechoslovakia and highlighted the lack of coordinated resistance to German ambitions.

## Soviet Union

The Soviet Union had previously offered to support Czechoslovakia against German aggression, but its involvement was limited by diplomatic isolation and a lack of cooperation from Western powers. Although the USSR condemned the Munich Agreement, it did not intervene militarily. Later, in 1945, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in liberating Czechoslovakia from German control and helped shape post-war Europe.

## League of Nations

The League of Nations' response to the invasion and subsequent dismantling of Czechoslovakia in 1938 was strikingly limited and ineffective, reflecting both its structural weaknesses and the declining influence it held in international affairs by the late 1930s. As Germany annexed the Sudetenland following the Munich Agreement—a settlement brokered without Czechoslovak input and outside the League's framework—the League neither condemned the act nor attempted to mediate or intervene diplomatically. This lack of action was emblematic of the League's deteriorating authority, as key member states, including France and the United Kingdom, chose to act unilaterally through appeasement rather than seeking collective action under the League's charter.

Furthermore, when Germany violated the Munich Agreement and occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the League again failed to issue a formal resolution or initiate any sanctions. This inaction was partly due to the League's reliance on consensus-based decision-making and its lack of enforcement mechanisms, but also stemmed from a broader reluctance among European powers to confront Germany militarily at that stage. As a result, the League's passive stance during the crisis not only failed to protect Czechoslovakia's sovereignty but also signaled to aggressor states that violations of international agreements could proceed without meaningful consequence. This failure further eroded global confidence in the League and contributed to its eventual collapse and replacement by the United Nations after World War II.

