

Germany to Czechoslovakia, 15-3-1939

After the annexation of Sudetenland in 1938 (see # ultimatum Germany to Czechoslovakia, 24-9-1938) Germany continued to attempt and undermine the territorial unity of Czechoslovakia.¹ The German government had been actively promoting the split up of Czechoslovakia through its support for the establishment of the state of Slovakia. On the day that Slovakia declared its independence from Czechoslovakia on 14 March 1939, the Czech(oslovak) President Hácha requested and was granted a visit with German chancellor Hitler in Berlin. On his way to Berlin, Hácha learned that German forces had already entered the territory of the Slovak Republic. Hácha met with Hitler shortly after midnight on 15 March. Upon his arrival, Hácha was told by Hitler that German forces would march at 06:00 a.m. to invade his country. They would crush the Czech armed forces if they were met with resistance. Alternatively, Hácha could put his country's fate in German hands in which case it would be spared obliteration.² Hácha and his Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky were put under enormous pressure to comply under threats of the direct bombardment of Prague. Following consultations by telephone with their fellow cabinet members, Hácha and Chvalkovsky finally saw no alternative but to surrender.³ At 4 a.m. they put their signature on an agreement that stated:

the aim of all efforts in this part of Central Europe should be the safeguarding of calm, order, and peace. The Czecho-Slovak President declared that in order to serve this purpose, and in order to secure final pacification, he placed the destiny of Czech people and country with confidence in the hands of the Führer of the German Reich. The Führer accepted this declaration and expressed his determination to take the Czech people under the protection of the German Reich and to guarantee to it an autonomous development of its national life in accordance with its particular characteristics.⁴

They also signed another agreement in which they promised that Czech security forces would not resist, economic life would continue while Czech media outlets would show 'complete reserve in public expression of opinion'.⁵ The Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky, upon leaving Hitler's offices, spoke the historic words: 'Our people will curse, and yet we have saved their existence. We have preserved them from a horrible massacre.'⁶ A few hours later German forces invaded Czechoslovak territory without meeting any resistance, later that day followed by Hitler who spent the night in Prague. The next day Hitler declared the establishment of the German protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.⁷

¹ Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1938*, 694–98; Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 266–74; esp. 266–69; Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, *The World in March 1939*, 286–88. Christopher Thorne, *The Approach of War: 1938-1939* (Macmillan, 1969), 72–87, 88–89.

² Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, *The World in March 1939*, 266–67.

³ Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, 268.

⁴ Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 267.

⁵ Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, *The World in March 1939*, 268.

⁶ Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 269.

⁷ Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, *The World in March 1939*, 270, 272.