

Hungary to Czechoslovakia, 14-3-1939

German Chancellor Adolf Hitler had sent word that he would not oppose Hungarian action vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia to the government of Hungary on 12 March.¹ The Hungarian government's written response came on 13 March in which it expressed its gratitude for Hitler's letter and announced its plans to engineer a frontier incident as a pretext for the invasion on 16 March.² But when Slovakia announced its independence on 14 March, the Hungarian government felt a sense of urgency to secure its claims. On 14 March, at 3 p.m. Hungary's foreign minister presented an ultimatum to the Czech(oslovak) representative in Budapest. The ultimatum, carrying a time limit of twelve hours, demanded the following:

- (1) That persons of Hungarian nationality who have been interned shall at once be liberated.
- (2) That the persecution of persons of Hungarian origin shall at once cease and they shall be granted complete liberty to organise themselves.
- (3) That weapons shall be issued to the Hungarian defence organisations.
- (4) That the evacuation of the territory of Ruthenia by Czech and Moravian troops shall commence within 24 hours.
- (5) That the property of Hungarian subjects and of members of the Hungarian nation shall in every way be respected.³

The note added that should an answer not be forthcoming by the stated deadline, the Hungarian government held 'the Prague Government in every way responsible for the consequences.'⁴ Western governments had kept their distance from the negotiations between the two countries that had been going on since the Godesberg agreement.⁵ The Prague government replied eight hours later, announcing its willingness to comply with all demands except for the provision of weapons to Hungarian groups. This answer was taken as a rejection by the Hungarian government. In the early morning of 15 March Hungarian forces invaded the remnants of the territory of Czechoslovakia and made their way to Ruthenia.⁶ Meanwhile, Ruthenia had already declared its independence. Ruthenian dissident leaders repeatedly attempted to engage German support, who invaded Czech territory on that same day (see Germany to Czechoslovakia, 15-3-1939). When it turned out that Germany support was not forthcoming, they attempted to strike a deal with Hungary. When that failed, their invitation to Romanian forces was also rejected. Hungarian forces marched on largely unopposed to the Polish border encountering only pockets of resistance.⁷ Despite ongoing low level fighting with Ukrainian factions, Hungary concluded the occupation on 19 March.⁸ In the final week of March it fought and won a war – which became later known as the Little War – against Slovakia for a stroke of territory along the Hungarian-Slovak border.

¹ Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 477. Erik Goldstein and Igor Lukes, *The Munich Crisis 1938: Prelude to World War II* (Routledge, 2012), 117–18.

² Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 253.

³ Government of Great Britain, 'DBFP040720256; 3419/71/21, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939', 1939, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:dbpo:&rft_dat=xri:dbpo:rec:DBFP040720256. Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 254. Keith Eubank, *The Origins of World War II* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 125.

⁴ Government of Great Britain, 'DBFP040720256; 3419/71/21, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939'.

⁵ Goldstein and Lukes, *The Munich Crisis 1938*, 110–11.

⁶ Laffan, *Survey of International Affairs 1938: Volume 3*, 254.

⁷ Laffan, 254–55. No specific fatality numbers are offered, but the conclusion that these encounters claimed casualties, seems warranted

⁸ Toynbee and Ashton-Gwatkin, *The World in March 1939*, 289.