Caught Between Independence and Irredentism: the “Jewish Question” in the Foreign Policy of the Kállay Government, 1942-1944

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The deportation and genocide of the Hungarian Jews in 1944 and early 1945 has been well documented and studied. However, relatively few scholarly monographs and articles deal with the road to genocide in Hungary, particularly with the events of the preceding three war years. This earlier period, which is the focus of this article, differs significantly from the last stage of the Holocaust. The German Wehrmacht conquered Western Europe with relative ease in 1940 and, until the Battle of Stalingrad in late 1942 and early 1943, it seemed to have been winning the war in the East, as well. Even in the summer of 1943, since a compromise settlement between the Germans and the Russians was still possible, no one could predict the final outcome of the military conflict with certainty. Although information about the mass and increasingly mechanized killings had periodically reached the West since 1941, the leaders of the “free world” and their political and military advisors were reluctant to accept the news, not to mention to adjust their war-time strategies to stop the killings. The British and the Americans had long given up on Hungary as a possible ally or even as a neutral state. Located deep in the German sphere of influence and behind enemy lines, what transpired in this small nation state largely escaped the attention of leaders in London and Washington until the late spring of 1944. The fate of the intensely patriotic Hungarian Jews, who, for decades, had shunned foreign ties, concerned as well only a few people in the West. Hungarian Jews fully expected to survive the war, and were secure in the knowledge that their government and nation at large would never surrender them to the Nazis. They proved to be wrong.
The goal of the following investigation is to examine the multiple functions, and measure the relative importance, of the so-called Jewish question in Hungary’s relations with Nazi Germany, Romania and Slovakia between 1942 and 1944. The first part discusses revisionism, perceived as the cornerstone of Hungarian foreign policy, and its impact on domestic policy in the 1930s and during the war. The second part explores the relationship between Hungary and two of its Eastern European neighbours in the context of their alliance with Nazi Germany and their participation in Hitler’s wars of aggression. It highlights the propensity of the heads of the satellite states to resort to anti-Semitic arguments to curry favour with the Nazi dictator; diminish the reputation of their rivals; improve the position of their countries in the new Europe and, most importantly, obtain a favourable settlement of the outstanding territorial disputes. The third, final part, of the essay, draws attention to the Nazi reaction to Prime Minister Miklós Kállay’s attempt to find a way out of the war and save the lives of Hungarian Jews. The article touches on a whole range of relevant issues, such as the role of humanitarian considerations in foreign policy, the relationship between small and big states, dependency, imperialism versus sub-imperialism, and the tendency of small countries to manipulate the fears and exploit the obsessions of their more powerful allies and friends. What role revisionism and anti-Semitism played in Hungarian foreign policy and how foreign policy events contributed to the genocide of Hungarian Jews are the subjects of this article.

Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period: Caught Between Revisionism and the Desire for Independence

Based on the values and modus operandi of nineteenth-century Realpolitik, Hungarian foreign policy in the interwar period pursued limited goals. Trained in Vienna before the war or in Budapest after 1919 by diplomats who had started their careers in the capital of the Dual Monarchy, Hungarian statesmen continued to see the territorial states, rather than so-called races or social classes, as the basic units of the international order. They believed in the primacy of foreign policy: Hungarian statesmen perceived nation states as independent actors motivated by geopolitical interest, tradition, national character and Zeitgeist (spirit of the time) rather than conflicts between social groups. Nation states, unlike modern empires, had limited interests, which could be defended or advanced by forming temporary alliances with like-minded actors. Alliances were to be based on
shared geopolitical concerns rather than ideological affinities or common values. The domestic order, that is the social and political structure, of prospective allies remained a secondary issue. The practitioners of Realpolitik regarded war as the last resort, and a means to an end rather than an end in itself: as a tragedy, rather than a fortune or an opportunity to establish a new social and political order or create a new man and a superior race. The goal of Realpolitik was to restore balance in the international order and preserve peace.

Many, indeed the majority, of European states in the interwar period continued to conduct their foreign affairs according to the norms of Realpolitik. What made the Hungarian case different, in some sense unique, was that the country had been defeated during the war and humiliated in its aftermath. Hungarian foreign policy was a product of the “culture of defeat.” In the interwar period, the country was reeling under three traumas, which coloured the perception of its politicians and limited the Spielraum of its diplomats. The failed communist experiment of 1919 traumatized the Hungarian middle classes and made cooperation with the Soviet Union, even on shared concerns, exceedingly difficult. Second, the Romanian occupation of 1919, perceived as one of the worst humiliations in their history, combined with the huge territorial losses to Romania, dramatically increased hostility between the two countries, precluding normal contact between their elites. Finally, the Treaty of Trianon, which most people attributed to France and Britain, erected a mental and emotional barrier between Hungary and the Western democracies. That the Western counties failed to make amends, and continued to act as the protector of Hungary’s neighbours and the guarantors of their borders, naturally frustrated the political class in Budapest, and make them look elsewhere for support.

The two guiding principles of Hungarian foreign policy during the Horthy regime remained independence and irredentism. Both ideas were the products of the nineteenth-century nationalism and liberalism and the political conflicts with the Habsburg dynasty and the ethnic minorities. Compared to the objectives of the major powers, such as imperial expansion; conquest of Lebensraum (living space); ethnic cleansing; world revolution and creation of a global dictatorship of the proletariat, these were conservative and moderate goals. Although not obvious to the contemporaries initially, independence and irredentism were difficult to reconcile. The truism that the sovereignty of countries, particularly that of small states, can be only be relative in the modern era rang especially true for
weak states, such as Hungary, which needed the support of the great powers to realize their dreams of revenge and territorial (re)conquest. The support of the great powers, if it had been forthcoming at all, always came at a heavy price. Hungarian statesmen and diplomats during the Horthy regime had to navigate between subservience and resistance. They had to convince the great powers that Hungarian revisionist goals were not only just but they were also in their interests to support them. They had to be attractive, without surrendering too much. Hungarian statesmen wanted to regain their pride without losing self respect; change the country’s borders but preserve its status as an independent state.

Hungarians, irrespective of their social and political background, rejected the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, which sanctioned the loss of two-thirds of country’s territory and placed one-third of the Magyar-speaking population under foreign rule. As many objective foreign observers also noted, the Treaty was unfair and vindictive. Yet, had the Western powers and the neighbouring states been prepared to make amends, apologize for their misdeeds and perhaps even hold referendums in the ethnically mixed regions, the government in Budapest, not to mention the more extremist elements in the Hungarian population, would still have not been satisfied. The revision of the borders, in other words, was as much a rational demand as it was a psychological problem; as much a domestic-policy issue as it was a foreign-policy goal. Irredentism in Europe was an ideological issue. With the foundation of the League of Patriots and Boulangism, starting in France in the 1870s and 1880s, the revision of the borders though force became a standard theme in the propaganda, and an important weapon in the ideological arsenal, of the European radical and fascist Right. In Hungary, too, the almost universal desire for the restoration of the old borders benefited mainly the conservative and radical Right. The leader and the radical and fascist Rights demanded not only the abrogation of the Treaty of Trianon, they also rejected liberalism, democracy, Marxist socialism and Western humanitarian traditions. The radical and fascist Rights did not seek to restore the pre-war conservative liberal regime; rather they wanted to renew society and build a state on the basis of martial values; the veneration of strong leaders; the cult of youth, violence and death; anti-Communism and, perhaps most importantly, anti-Semitism. After 1921, the right-wing version of revisionism was complemented with, and competed with, a more moderate conservative variety (popular among professional diplomats), which took political realities more into consideration. However, the conservative brand of irredentism
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enjoyed, along with the even more moderate, democratic, liberal and socialist versions of the same idea, only limited support: public opinion in Hungary, until the end of the Horthy regime, dreamt of full restoration, and it saw the revision of the Treaty of Trianon on the basis of democratic principles as, at best, a temporary solution.5

The tension between independence and irredentism, the desire for full sovereignty in domestic and foreign affairs and the restoration of the old borders, were already palpable in the 1920s and early 1930s. After 1925, Mussolini and his Foreign Minister, Ciano, tried to spread Italian influence into the Danubian Basin. Determined to turn Hungary into an Italian dependency, the fascist leaders made many promises, albeit no concrete commitment to the revision of the new borders.6 The Nazis were even more cautious. In June 1933, less than six months after the Nazi takeover of power, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös was the first European head of state to visit Hitler in Berlin.7 He was received with great fanfare; yet, even in this early stage, the Nazis courteously rejected his idea to create a German-led block of revisionist states and sign a treaty of eternal friendship with Hungary. Hitler and his coterie wanted to have nothing to do with the idea of a multi-ethnic Kingdom of Saint Stephan, which they saw as an anachronism; in addition, they did not want to alienate the small states in the region by openly supporting the Hungarian claims.8

Nazi Germany refused to make any commitment to Hungarian revisionism; Hitler and his colleagues wanted free hand in reshaping the map of East-Central Europe. On the other hand, they expected that the small states in the region would do their bidding: Hungarian statesmen would willingly renounce their independence by adjusting their goals and behaviour to Nazi plans. Simmering under the surface for years, the conflict between the Nazi desire to subjugate Hungary, and Hungarian ambition to regain the lost territories via German help, became acute during the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1938. Fearing international isolation and military defeat, Regent Miklós Horthy and his advisors refused to play the role of an agent provocateur, even though Hitler promised the entire Slovakia as a reward. Because of the Hungarian refusal to attack Czechoslovakia, Berlin had to give up its plan to dismember its hated neighbour in the fall. Still, the First Vienna Award of November 1938 restored Hungarian sovereignty over southern Slovakia, which had an overwhelmingly Magyar-speaking population. Since the new borders more or less followed ethnic lines, Great Britain also recognized the First Vienna Award as legitimate. Six months later, in March 1939, the Hungarian army occupied Sub-
Carpathian Ruthenia to create a common border with Poland, Hungary’s historical ally. The British government, significantly, did not protest against the Hungarian occupation of the region. London registered with satisfaction that Hungary had refused to participate in, or indirectly aid, the German attack on Poland in the fall; British statesmen were particularly impressed by the generosity with which the government in Budapest received the tens of thousands of Polish refugees who fled across the border in the wake of defeat. Many of these refugees soon left the country to join Polish units in the British, French and even American armies to liberate Europe from the Nazi yoke.\(^9\)

These first successes reinforced the Hungarian political elite’s conviction that they could manipulate the Nazi threat to their advantage; remain Germany’s ally without losing their independence; regain territories without firing a shot, and profit from German expansionism without losing face with the West. However, the Second Vienna Award of August 1940, which returned one-third of Transylvania and 2.5 million people, one half of whom were Magyar-speakers, to Hungary, exposed the limits and contradictions of this “cherry-picking” approach to foreign policy. Hungary owed its last great foreign-policy success to the Soviet-Romanian conflict and Fascist Italy rather than to Hitler, and the Nazis, who would have preferred minor changes along the existing border. The Award predictably satisfied neither Hungary nor Romania, which remained in a quasi state of war with each other the next four years. The real winner of the Second Vienna Award was Nazi Germany. The conflict between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania facilitated the economic exploitation of both countries, reinforced their dependence on the Third Reich, in both the political and military spheres, and made their departure from the Nazi-led alliance exceedingly difficult.\(^10\)

The partial restoration of the old border demanded a heavy price: Hungarian statesmen were rapidly losing control over the country’s foreign and domestic policy. In November 1938, in the wake of the First Vienna Award, at Nazi Germany’s insistence, the Hungarian government sanctioned the setting-up of the first *Volksbund* groups. Conceived as the self-governing body of the German minority, the *Volksbund* looked to Berlin, rather than Budapest, for guidance, instruction and support. By 1942, it had become a state-within-a-state, one of the most important engines of right-wing radicalization and an agent of German imperialism. Under German pressure, Hungary also left the League of Nations and joined the Anti-Commintern Pact in 1939. By joining the Tripartite Pact in
November 1940, Hungary officially abandoned its neutrality and became a military ally of the fascist states and Japan against the West. Deliveries of food and animal fodder to Germany had increased significantly in the late 1930s and early 1940s, while Hungarian industry became almost completely dependent on the Third Reich for technology, investment and markets. In 1940, Budapest allowed the transit of German troops to occupy the Romanian oil fields. In early April 1941, a week after the German invasion and in the wake of Croatia’s declaration of independence from Yugoslavia, Hungarian army units, with German permission, occupied the northern part of the defunct state. The occupation was done independently and not on Nazi orders; yet it also suited well the German plans. On her own, without German request but in the climate of intense anti-Bolshevism and pro-Nazi sentiment, Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union on June 27, 1941. Great Britain, as the ally of the Soviet Union, returned the favour on December 7, 1941. Herbert Pell, the American Minister to Hungary, and a friend and admirer of the country, suggested to Prime Minister László Bárdossy that he should attach a letter to the Hungarian declaration of war on the United States to explain that the Hungarian government had acted under duress. However, Bárdossy (who, until his appointment as Prime Minister had been much more cautious and pro-Western) rejected Pell’s advice and abruptly responded that the Hungarian government had acted independently of Berlin. Hungary in due course declared war on the United States on December 12, 1941. However, President Roosevelt did not consider the declaration from a small East-Central European state important enough to notify the Senate for several months. The Senate finally declared war on Hungary in early June 1942. Meanwhile, in January 1942, the Budapest government, hoping that its services would be rewarded with the restoration of Hungarian sovereignty over Transylvania in its entirety, dispatched a 200,000-man strong army to the Eastern front. Simultaneously, it gave Berlin the right to recruit ethnic Germans, many of whom did not speak their ancestors’ language, into the Waffen SS.

The gradual loss of sovereignty implied German involvement in what the Nazis considered the most important issue in the world: finding a radical solution to the so-called Jewish Question. The link between Hungarian foreign policy and the growing influence of the Third Reich on domestic policy, in general, and on anti-Jewish legislation, in particular, was first indirect. The victory of Nazism strengthened the radical and fascist Right in Hungary, and made anti-Semitism more respectable. The First and the Second Anti-Jewish Laws of 1938 and 1939 had to do with
domestic rather than foreign policy considerations; these legislations served to solve deep-seeded social problems at the expense of Jews, and to take the wind out of the agitation of the national socialists. Yet it is unlikely that these laws would have been passed, had Great Britain rather than Germany become Hungary’s new neighbour in 1938. The first two laws limited the number of Jews in businesses and the liberal professions; excluded them from the civil service, and deprived the majority of Hungarian citizens of Jewish background of the right to cast their votes in local and national elections. Even though there were still loopholes in these legislations and corruption often saved lives and livelihoods, the social and psychological impact of these legislations cannot be overstated: by the end of 1940, more than 200,000 people had lost their jobs and tens of thousands of families had been reduced to poverty. The relation between foreign policy and anti-Jewish legislation was more obvious in the case of the Third Anti-Jewish Law of 1941. The law, which forbade marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Gentiles, was passed in the wake of the Nazi attack and Hungarian declaration of war on the Soviet Union. A result of self-Gleichschaltung rather than direct demand from Berlin, the Third Anti-Jewish Law reflected the increasing Nazification of large segments of the Hungarian political elite. This process was fuelled by the physical proximity of the Third Reich, German victories in the first phase of the war, and the success of Hungarian irredentism thanks to the support of the fascist states.15

From Patriots to Traitors and War Criminals: The Extreme Right during the War

The greatest threat to the lives of Jews in Hungary came from the leaders and members of the national socialist parties and their open or clandestine supporters in the army, the gendarmerie and the civil service. The extreme Right supported the German alliance for political and cultural reasons. Racism, anti-Slavic and anti-Russian sentiments pushed many to take the side of Nazi Germany in its struggle against ‘eastern races.’ Nazi Germany, in this interpretation, represented Western civilization; Hungary, as an integral part of this civilization, had the duty to support the Germans in their life-and-death struggle against the ‘subhuman’ Slavs. As one of the architects of the Hungarian phase of the Holocaust, the Minister of the Interior, Andor Jaross explained to his judges at his trial in 1946, “in the Danubian Basin, two currents collide: the Germans and the Slavs. I have
no doubt that there is only road open to Hungary: it has to support fully its ally Germany, which represents European culture.\footnote{16}

The support of the Hungarian extreme right for Nazi Germany was far from automatic. Many Hungarian national socialists were originally attracted to Italian Fascism rather than to German Nazism; the majority found Teutonic racial doctrines too rigid, the Nazis too arrogant and German imperialism and expansion into East Central Europe too dangerous to cast their lot with the Third Reich and embrace the Nazi model.\footnote{17} Only under the impact of German military victories during the first stage of the war, and the partial success of Hungarian revisionist goals did they convert fully to the Nazi cause. As László Baky, Eichmann’s friend, and one of the three Hungarian architects of the Holocaust put it during his trial in 1946, “we attributed the return of the territories to the strength of the German Reich.”\footnote{18} Hungarian national socialists were grateful to the Third Reich, and could not imagine that, under any circumstance, they would betray their benefactor, ally and friend. Some feared Nazi imperialism; yet they still preferred German victory to Western triumph, not to mention, to Russian conquest. The West, the national socialists contended, had never supported Hungarian revisionism: were the Anglo-Saxon powers to win the conflict, they would surely penalize the country for choosing the Third Reich and Fascist Italy as its allies. A Soviet victory, on the other hand, would spell the end of the Hungarian nation and state. After Stalingrad, the leading national socialists (with the exception of a handful of fanatics, such as Baky, who believed in German victory until the spring of 1945) recognized that Nazi Germany could not win the war. However, at least until the summer of 1944, they thought that a negotiated settlement, a deal between Hitler and the Allies that would leave Hungary and East Central Europe in German hands was still possible. In any case, the majority was prepared to die for the cause in which they believed. They saw no way out of the ideological and political trap into which they had fallen, and preferred honourable death, and even national suicide, to the eternal shame of betrayal.\footnote{19}

National socialists, as Jaross explained during his trial in 1946, did not consider Jews Hungarian, but members of a different and hostile race. Even the most assimilated and patriotic Jews, Jaross argued, preferred the company of their coreligionists to that of non-Jews; when the interest of the two groups collided, they never failed to side with their own kind. In the national socialist interpretation antisemitism, including pogroms and other forms of violence, was only a natural reaction of the host nations to
Jewish greed, pretention and arrogance. The national socialists wanted to find a “civilized solution” to the so-called Jewish Question, which, after 1941, meant deportation to the Third Reich or occupied Poland and Ukraine and mass murder. It was “civilized” only to the extent that the killing was done by others, and out of sight of the Hungarian population. National socialist antisemitism was part and parcel of “palingenetic ultranationalism,” which perceived war as an opportunity to revive the nation and create a new man. In time of war, the national socialist in Hungary believed, one had to focus on individual and national survival; he or she could not display empathy for the weak and the unfortunate, not to mention, for the real or alleged enemies of the race. Western humanism, as an ideology, was dead, Jaross told his audience in Nagyvárad during the Holocaust; he then asked his listeners of what they considered more important: “the fate of 13.5 million Hungarians… of a few hundred thousand people who have never belonged to the Hungarian community? Our goal cannot be the protection of… goodness at any price; rather our goal is to serve life.”

The national socialists’ antisemitism was home-grown: their demand to expropriate, segregate and deport Jews was motivated by native prejudices and interests. The Hungarian national socialists used the war and their country’s close ties to Nazi Germany to put pressure on the government to bring about the radical solution of the so-called Jewish Question. Thus, in the wake of the Hungarian declaration of war on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, parliamentary representatives of the Arrow Cross Party demanded that every Jew be placed under police surveillance, since “it is well known that they actively participate in the war and work against both the Third Reich and us.” In December 1941, at least six months before the German government raised the same issues, they insisted on the introduction of the yellow star, full segregation, the setting up of ghettos, forced labour and prohibition of sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. In March 1943, in a memorandum, the national socialist deputies asked Regent Horthy to replace the parliamentary system with a modern, and allegedly efficient, dictatorship. In early May 1943, the same group of parliamentary representatives sent a memorandum to Regent Horthy demanding that “the Jewry must be isolated from the body of the nation, and preparation must be made for their final expropriation, when reparations will be made by the Jews for all the intellectual and financial damages they have done to Magyedom.” In the second half of 1943 and early 1944, radical right-wing politicians, such as Béla Lukács,
Ferenc Rajnis and ex-Prime Minister, Béla Imrédy gave several rousing speeches in the parliament, expressing their unwavering support for the war and the Nazi alliance. In the same breath, they urged the government to take steps to immediately deport, or at least make preparations for the deportation of, Hungarian Jews. Jewish black-marketers and speculators increased misery and destroyed public morality; wealthy Jewish landowners, bankers and manufacturers stood in the way of serious social, especially land, reform, and the Jewish community as a whole represented a grave threat to the country’s security, radical right-wing politicians argued. In March 1944, less than two weeks before the German occupation of the country, the news agency of the state, the conservative Hungarian News Agency (Magyar Távirati Iroda or MTI), passed on to Regent Horthy and his advisors a secret report. It stated that:

there are then those on the Right, and not a few of them, who are determined to settle scores (elintéz) with the Jews. It is not only the extremist members of the Arrow Cross but also, often enough, the followers of Imrédy who speak openly about the [need for] pogroms. They say that we have to exterminate the Jews now, lest they create chaos and Communism if the situation turns from bad to worse. In these circles, the hatred of the Jews is stronger and bitterer than it was when the anti-Jewish laws had been debated.

Beside the national socialist parties, it was the officer corps of the Army and the rural police, the gendarmerie, who counted among the most fanatical supporters of the war and the German alliance in the early 1940s; the same institutions played an important role in the Jewish genocide. Born in a civil war after the collapse of the Council Republic in 1919, the independent Honvéd was never able to shed its counterrevolutionary origins: its officers remained fiercely nationalistic, anti-communist and, with a few notable exceptions, anti-Semitic in the interwar period. This was even truer for the gendarmerie, which provided a haven for leaders and the rank-and-file for the murderous right-wing paramilitary groups after 1923. Impressed with the élan and technological superiority of the German army and the rapid militarization of German society, the officer corps became, after 1935, increasingly pro-German and pro-Nazi as well. Yet, despite their admiration for the Wehrmacht, the Hungarian military elite, as we have seen, still opposed direct participation in the Czechoslovak conflict in 1938, and made their opinion known to the political leaders. The military elite abandoned this cautious approach only under
the impact of Nazi victories in Poland in 1939 and in the West in 1940. Under the leadership of Henrik Werth, the Chief of the General Staff and Károly Bartha, the Minister of Defence, the Army became the main proponent of the war and of alliance with Nazi Germany. The two men helped to persuade the Regent to declare war, on false pretences, on the Soviet Union at the end of June of 1941. Werth’s and Bartha’s enthusiasm for the German and Nazi cause in 1941 knew no limits; they were even prepared to transport the entire Hungarian Army to the Russian front, if requested by Hitler. Their unquestioning support for the Nazi cause was too much even for Regent Horthy, who had also become more pro-German in the early stages of the war. In September 1941, the Regent replaced Werth with the more cautious Ferenc Szombathelyi, who represented the more pro-Western segment of the military elite. Szombathelyi was unable to reverse the course set by his predecessor, however; if anything, in the next sixteen months, the Hungarian army became even more entangled in the war in the East. In spring of 1942, Horthy and his advisors sent 200,000 soldiers, the entire Second Army, to the Eastern Front, which, like the German Sixth Army, would be completely destroyed during the Battle of Voronezh in early 1943.

Contemporary intelligence reports paint a grim picture of the political allegiance and activities of the Hungarian military elite during the war. According to one of these reports, the overwhelming majority of high-ranking officers was both pro-German and supported the Arrow Cross or other fascist groups. As for their political orientation, pro-German and pro-Nazi officers in Horthy’s entourage outnumbered their pro-British and politically less radical counterparts by three to one. Anti-Semitism became all-pervasive, too. Many officers used the new anti-Semitic laws to get rid of unwanted colleagues and competitors. On the basis of denunciations, between 1939 and 1942 the Ministry of Defence dismissed from their jobs hundreds of part-Jewish officers (there were no fully Jewish officers in the Army) and professional soldiers whose spouses had descended from Jewish families. The participation of the officer corps in the anti-Jewish campaigns did not end with the expulsion of Mischlinge from the Army, however. In the spring of 1939, Hungarian army and paramilitary units committed dozens of atrocities against Jews and Ukrainians in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Typically, the Hungarian authorities tried to silence the Zionist leader in Ruthenia, Cháim Kugel, who, during his foreign trips, had allegedly sought to draw the attention of international organizations to the plight of local Jews and to Hungarian
policy to rob thousands of Jews of Hungarian citizenship and expel them from the region. With barely disguised joy, Hungarian officials reported that many Orthodox Jews had been trying to find refuge in Soviet-Siberia. Others headed for Palestine. According to the report, recent Jewish immigrants from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia deeply resented British support for the Arabs in Palestine, and did not hide their sympathy for Italy in its war against the Western allies.

The mistreatment of Hungarian and Ukrainian Jews in the recently occupied Ruthenia did not represent an isolated incident, but only the first step on the long road to genocide. In the spring of 1941, Hungarian authorities expelled tens of thousands of Serbs, mainly immigrants and the representatives of the defunct state of Yugoslavia, from the recently occupied territories. They also killed hundreds of Romanians who resisted the occupation, and prompted thousands to flee Northern Transylvania after the summer of 1940. With the declaration of war on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Báróssy government ordered the deportation of foreign Jews. In the summer, the rural police, the infamous gendarmerie, collected between 15,000 and 18,000 people, not only “illegals” but many Hungarian citizens and lawful immigrants, and transported them, first to the border-town of Körösmező, and then to the southern Ukrainian towns of Kamenets-Podolsk, Stanislau and Horodenka. On route, the sadistic guards had robbed, beaten and tortured many of the prisoners; according to the witnesses’ accounts, mutilation and murder were also common. Upon arrival, the Hungarians handed the deportees over to a German Einsatzgruppe to massacre them. In January 1942, in the village of Zsablya and the town of Újvidék (Novi Sad), Hungarian army and gendarmerie units murdered, as part an anti-insurgency operation, thousands of civilians, including women and children; many hundreds of their victims were Jews.

Under the ministerial decree of 1941, and the Military Service Act of 1942, Jewish men of military age were excluded from conscription; instead of regular formations, they were forced to serve in unarmed auxiliary labour battalions, which could be employed both at home and at the front. The officers who commanded the labour battalions were of very low quality; army leaders often put sadists, violent anti-Semites and Nazis into positions of power and these used their commission to torture, work or starve to death or outright murder their subordinates. Between 1941 and the summer of 1943 more than 42,000 Jewish soldiers died of mistreatment, became wounded or fell into Soviet captivity on the Eastern
front. Thanks to the appointment of General Vilmos Nagy as Minister of Defence, their situation finally began to improve in late 1942. From then on, abuses became less common and, and they claimed fewer lives. Fifteen labour companies were sent to work in Serbian copper mines in the framework of Organization Todt in the second part of the war. The majority of the detainees died of mistreatment or were killed, like the famous poet Miklós Radnóti, who died during the death march of 1944. By 1944, ideological penetration had gone so far that the conservative political elite could no longer count on the Army to fulfill its duties. Even though there were plenty of signs of an impending invasion, military leaders failed to prepare the country for a German attack in March 1944. The military leaders considered resistance against German occupation futile; yet, paradoxically, they were prepared to defend the Carpathian Mountain Ranges against the much larger and, by 1944, much stronger Red Army. The Hungarian Army, unlike the German Wehrmacht, played only a limited role in the genocide. On the other hand, the gendarmerie, which had been army-trained and stood, in part, under the control of the Ministry of Defence, not only helped to collect Jews, which was their original order, but it also, ‘proactively,’ participated in the deportation. The Army failed to defend the country against the invaders and prevent the deportation of Hungarian citizens. Yet what they did was not only a matter omission but also that of commission. In the summer and fall of the same year, the military elite betrayed Horthy and his conservative advisors in their desperate attempt to find an honourable way out of the war. The majority of officers refused to abandon their German ally; on October 15, on the day of an attempted coup, they also violated their oath to Regent Horthy by siding with the new Arrow Cross government. Many continued to fight against the Soviet troops, thus prolonging the country’s suffering, until the spring of 1945. Yet it was not only the radical rationalists in the national socialists parties and the armed forces, who were prepared to sacrifice full sovereignty on the altar of revisionism, and accept the country’s status as Nazi Germany’s satellite. Irredentism, the just desire to re-gain at least some of the lost territories and liberate fellow Hungarian from foreign rule drove large segments of the population into Hitler’s arms. Until 1942, with a few notable exceptions, such as Endre Bajcsy Zsilinsky, everyone in Hungary, from underground Communists to traditional liberal conservatives, supported the German alliance. The Communists worried only about the growing political influence of the national socialist and fascist parties at
home. Yet popular support for the Nazis in Hungary also remained shallow and proved to be transient; like Hitler’s charisma, it depended on continued German military successes. As the war turned sour for the Nazis after the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943, the majority of Hungarians, too, began to have second thoughts about the Nazi alliance and the war. According to a German embassy report, by 1943, the social political and cultural elite, including the leaders of the Christian churches, had become pro-British and anti-German; only the members of extreme right-wing parties and young military officers in Hungary had still supported the war. The Hungarian public appraised the political situation more realistically, and did not regard leaving the Axis alliance a moral issue. That there was still relatively little resistance, in the forms of sabotage, destruction of infrastructure and attacks on German troops, to the Nazi invasion in the spring and summer of 1944 should not be attributed to cowardness or widespread sympathy for the Axis cause, not to mention popular support for the German-led Jewish genocide. The sight of German soldiers on Hungarian soil was not new: the Wehrmacht had been using Hungarian railways and roads for years to transport their soldiers to the front. The Hungarian public had been taught to think that German soldiers were allies and friends, who came to help to defend the country’s eastern frontiers against the Bolshevik archenemy. Finally, the conservative political elite not only failed to secure the support of the officer corps and organize the army to defeat the invasion; it also failed to prepare the public psychologically for the invasion. Fragmented into small groups and preoccupied with survival, the Hungarian public watched the unfolding of events from the sidelines, or were swept away, either as victims or perpetrators, by them.

The Role of the ‘Jewish Question’ in Hungary’s Relations with Its Neighbours and with Nazi Germany

Hungary was not the only the county in East-Central Europe that had to find a balance between independence and irredentism: the desire to maintain its sovereignty in domestic and foreign policy and draw the border in a way to incorporate every member of the ethnic community. Every ethnic group and state was at one point irredentist East-Central Europe between 1860 and 1945 (and beyond). A product of nineteenth-century nationalism, irredentism was exacerbated by the First World War and the blatantly unfair peace treaties in its aftermath. In the old Austro-
Hungarian Empire, minorities could look to the royal house and the cosmopolitan segments of the political and social elite, such as the aristocracy and the Catholic Church, for protection. In the small, more democratic, nation states in the interwar period, however, the new political elite, who hailed for the middle and lower middle classes, cared little about the fate of ethnic and religious minorities. Abandoned and even demonized by the holders of power, the ethnic minorities in East Central Europe had only three options in the interwar period: they could leave their ancestral land; assimilate into the dominant group; seek to revise, with the help their brethren in the neighbouring states, the borders (betray their new country). This third option was not available to everyone. Jews who did not have homeland found themselves in a precarious position after 1919. Since they had historically identified, and culturally assimilated into, the dominant ethnic groups, they were even more likely to be accused of disloyalty in the interwar period. Ethnic Germans faced the same dilemma. Dispersed all over Eastern Europe, they were perceived (and after 1933 treated), as the agents of an imperial power, Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{49}

As an alternative to competition and war (and a means to hinder the involvement of imperial power in the business of small ethnic groups and states), Hungary and its neighbours could have forged closer ties with one another; instead of fortifying or re-drawing the existing borders and seeking to assimilate or expel unwanted “aliens,” they could have made the borders permeable. Indeed, after the First World War, the more far-sighted members of the Hungarian and Romanian elites toyed with the idea of a personal union between the two countries with the Romanian ruler as the king. Although it survived well into the Second World War, the idea of a personal union or federation could not be realized for lack of support from the major political parties. Cooperation against the common enemy also remained on the table until the very end of the war. After 1942, the Hungarian government sought contacts with the regime in Bucharest, as well as, with its liberal and conservative opposition in order to coordinate their plans to leave the Nazi camp. These top-level discussions did not go very far, however. The Romanian dictator, General Ion Antonescu, preferred “population exchange,” which implied the expulsion of the Hungarian population from Transylvania, to territorial solutions. His Deputy Prime Minister, Mihai Antonescu, a distant relative of the dictator, also demanded the return of Northern Transylvania as a prelude to any substantive negotiations.\textsuperscript{50} Negations with the Romanian opposition also failed to produce any results: no liberal or conservative politician was
prepared to accept the Second Vienna Award. István Bethlen, Horthy’s closest advisor, and his fellow Transylvanian aristocrats maintained good relations with Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the Conservative opposition in Romania. In the summer of 1943, Hungarian diplomats had intense discussions with Maniu on a whole range of issues from the fate of Transylvania to the possibility of coordinating their policies towards Nazi Germany and the Western Allies. The politically experienced Maniu, who before 1938 had supported the fascist Legionaries, admitted to his Hungarian colleagues that only Nazi Germany had profited from the rivalry between the two countries, Romania and Hungary, and the Nazi alliance hurt both lands. Maniu was less paranoid about the Soviet threat than his Hungarian partners. On the issue of Transylvania, the Romanian politician was not prepared to make any concessions, however. Transylvania belonged to Romania, he argued, and the Second Vienna Award had to be declared null and void before any serious negotiations could begin. Predictably, the talks bogged down in mutual accusations of war crimes and expressions of joy over each other’s distress. The Hungarians were convinced that the Romanians were internationally isolated; the West, they believed, would never forget that the Romanian army had turned weapons, which they had received from France, against their Soviet ally. The Western powers allegedly recognized that the Treaty of Trianon left Hungary with no other choice but to join the revisionist powers: Hungary was at least consistently pro-German, while Romania betrayed her friends. The West was also angrier at Romania, Hungarian politicians argued, because it had mistreated Jews. Maniu suggested that Romania still had a friend in the Czech exiled politician, Eduard Beneš, who was highly regarded in London and Washington. The Hungarian response to this was that Beneš as a political figure had passed his time: he was too pro-Russian to be taken seriously either by the British or the Americans.

The breakdown of talks between Maniu and the Bethlen circle reflected the troubled relations between the two countries during the war. In 1939 and 1940, it was the Romanians who were afraid that the Hungarian army, in alliance with the Soviets and the Bulgarians, would attack them. The position of the two countries changed completely after the Second Vienna Award of 1940. Until then, Hungary was the main revisionist power in the region. After the Second Vienna Award, and particularly following the Axis attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, however, Romania became the chief irredentist force in the region. Predictably both countries tried to manipulate the Nazis to their own
advantage. During his first meeting with the German dictator in April 1942, Prime Minister Kállay asked Hitler to prolong the military occupation of Romania to prevent the invasion of Hungary by the Romanian army. He also protested against stationing of battle-hardened Romanian troops in Southern Transylvania, close to the new Hungarian-Romanian border. The Romanian political elite not only wanted to reassert their sovereignty over all of Transylvania; they also sought to annex additional territories east of the Tisza River (thus realising the oldest dream of Romanian irredentism). They sought to achieve this plan by reviving, now under the patronage of Nazi Germany, the Little Entente, this time as an alliance of Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Bulgaria, and launching an attack by all members against their arch enemy Hungary. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mihai Antonescu first raised with Hitler the issue of an alliance among the three Balkan states and Slovakia against Hungary in November 1941. However, the Führer still did not trust the Romanians, who, until 1940, had been a military ally of Britain, enough to take the bait. Berlin wanted peace in South-Eastern Europe; a military conflict between Romania and Hungary would have only disrupted access to the regions’ economic resources, such as oil and aluminum, and would have endangered the war effort in Soviet-Russia. German administrators and diplomats complained bitterly about the attitude of Romanian and Hungarian leaders, who, obsessed with Transylvania, allegedly ignored the Bolshevik threat. In a memorandum dated early June 1942, Ernst Woermann, Head of the South-Eastern European Department within the German Foreign Ministry, argued that Germany’s role in the region was to exert a moderating influence on both parties. A few days later in a letter to the Foreign Ministry, Dietrich von Jagow, the German ambassador in Budapest, stated that Hitler, too, had guaranteed the Second Vienna Award, and he would not tolerate military aggression by either party. 

Nazi Germany was not a totalitarian state in the classical sense of the word: the foreign policy of the German government towards Eastern and South-Eastern Europe was no more consistent than its approach to education, culture or economic developments. State and party institutions with different visions and interests, such as the Foreign Ministry, NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs, Göring’s Office of the Four Year Plan, the Reich Youth Leadership, the Ministry of Propaganda and the SS all tried to influence, and even sought to set the parameters of, German foreign policy towards the region. This Social Darwinian struggle between state and party agencies only highlighted the role of Hitler both as the arbiter of
conflicts and ultimate decision-maker.\textsuperscript{58} Hitler held the Hungarians, the Romanians and the Slovaks in low regard. He also thought that National Socialism was not for export, and that the fascist parties and movements in the region did not deserve the full attention and trust of Nazi leaders. As a result of Nazi racism, the Third Reich provided only limited financial and political support to fascist parties and movements, such as the Romanian Legionaries and the Hungarian Arrow Cross in the region.\textsuperscript{59} Hitler’s goal was to ensure the economic exploitation of the three countries remain smooth during the war, and to end discrimination against, and improve the social and political status of, the German minorities. As we have seen, Hitler never embraced the Hungarian plan to restore the country’s pre-1918 borders; yet, he did not side with the Romanian and the Slovak nationalists either. The Nazi dictator deliberately encouraged competition between the satellite states by making vague promises and hinting at compensations at their neighbours’ expense after the war. What the post-war map of the region would look like, he either did not know or failed to betray to his allies, however.

Although Hitler and his advisors never renounced the Second Vienna Award, by the spring of 1943, they had begun to tilt towards Romania in its conflict with Hungary. As far as Hitler was concerned, Romania, unlike Hungary, had proven its mettle as a loyal and strategically important ally of the Third Reich: Bucharest contributed more men to the Nazi war effort than any other Eastern European country. Romanian army, gendarmerie and \textit{Einsatzgruppen} units also played a major role in the genocide of Jews in Bessarabia, Bukovina Transnistria and Southern Ukraine in 1941 and 1942.\textsuperscript{60} Bucharest remained the largest exporter of oil to Germany, a strategically vital commodity, the value of which only increased with the souring of the war effort in Russia. Finally, Hitler liked and respected the bright, peevish, arrogant and murderously anti-Semitic Marshall Ion Antonescu more than any other Eastern European statesman, Regent Horthy included.\textsuperscript{61}

By the fall of 1943, Hitler not only had become more pro-Romanian: he had also warmed up to the idea of the Little Entente under German sponsorship as well. The original Nazi plan to occupy Hungary in early 1944 thus foresaw the use of Slovak, Croat and Romanian troops; the latter were supposed to occupy Northern Transylvania and Eastern Hungary up to the Tisza River, thus bringing one of the oldest dreams of Romanian nationalism to fruition. Overwhelmed with joy, Marshall Antonescu immediately promised “one million men” to defeat the archenemy.\textsuperscript{62} At the
last minute, however, Hitler, on the advice of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the chief of the Gestapo, and two experts of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt), changed his mind. Lest the occupation lead to an armed insurgency in Hungary, the Germans decided to dispense with Romanian, Slovak and Croat troops. Even though the decision had already been made, on March 18, 1944, on the eve of the invasion, Hitler still talked to Horthy as if involvement of the neighbouring states would still be an option. His ruse worked: labouring under the memory of the ill-fated Council Republic and the Romanian invasion of 1919, Horthy ordered the Hungarian Army not to resist the invading Wehrmacht.  

The Nazis growing dislike of Hungary had to do not only with geopolitical and military considerations: Hitler and his advisors were also angered by what they considered the manifest philo-Semitism of Hungarian conservatives, and their refusal to participate in the genocide. In early summer of 1942, Berlin raised, for the first time, the issue of the expulsion of Hungarian Jews from the Third Reich; it also put pressure on the Hungarian government to introduce the yellow star and make preparations for their eventual expulsion from Hungary, as well. The deportation of the Jews, Nazi officials argued, “has to be solved in the same manner as it has happened in the case of Slovakia, Croatia and Romania.” In early October, German bureaucrats told their Hungarian colleagues that the presence of Hungarian Jews in the Third Reich posed a security threat, and they were determined to deport these alien Jews to the East, unless the government in Budapest arranged for their immediate departure. In regards to domestic policy, Nazi officials advised that Hungary should follow the example of Romania, Slovakia and Croatia, which had carried out the resettlement of the Jews with German help and support. A week later Jagow received a cable from his superiors in Berlin; he was told that it was “the wish of the Führer to solve completely the Jewish question as soon as possible.” The high cost incurred and the human sacrifices already made would all be in vain and the Third Reich would be humiliated, if the Jews would be allowed to remain in Europe and use their considerable economic and intellectual resources to defeat Nazi Germany and its allies in the war. The Ambassador was asked to put more pressure on the Hungarian government to complete the exclusion of Jews from the economic and cultural life of Hungary and make arrangements for their deportation. According to Prime Minister Kállay, in the first half of 1943 the Nazi government repeated the same request, falling back each time on the same arguments: Hungary was out of step with its neighbours, and indeed with
By the end of 1942, the genocide of the European Jews had become Hitler’s main goal and the raison d’être of the Nazi regime. Yet, as we have seen, the Nazis also instrumentalized anti-Semitism in foreign policy to ensure compliance with their orders, test the loyalty of their allies and introduce political and social changes in the satellites states. Manipulation and instrumentalization of the so-called Jewish question, however, was a two-way street: the satellites, Hungary and Romania included, also tried to exploit Nazi paranoia and genocidal hatred for the Jews to achieve their geo-political goals. Hungarian leaders thus never tired in emphasizing their anti-Semitic credentials: namely, that Hungary was the first state in Europe to pass anti-Semitic legislation after the First World War. Romanian politicians, on the other hand, rarely missed an opportunity to contrast their treatment of the Jews with the turpitude and “false humanism” of the Hungarian government. Thus, during his trip to Berlin in November 1941, Mihai Antonescu, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Romania, told Goebbels that the Hungarians were too corrupt and non-European even to comprehend, not to mention to act upon, the idea of “pure nationalism free of pro-Semitic tendencies;” he then added that the political elite in Budapest had secretly supported anti-German agitation in their country.68

While in Berlin Romanian leaders continued to brag about their “idealism” for the next two years, at home they secretly worried that they might have gone too far. By the end of 1942, even Antonescu had realized that his policy of full compliance did not produce any tangible results: Romanian sacrifices at the front and Romanian participation in the Holocaust did not bring the revision of the Vienna Diktat any closer. Beseeched by Queen Mother Elena, the Western powers, the Red Cross, the War Refugee Board, members of the old political elite, such as Maniu and the Liberals, and the leaders of the Jewish community, and even by his distant cousin, the equally murderous anti-Semite, Mihai Antonescu, the Conducător decided not to follow through with the deportation order in late 1942.69 In 1941 and 1942, the government in Bucharest had abandoned
Romanian Jews living in Nazi occupied Western Europe to their fate; however, in the next two years it sought to repatriate the survivors. Marshall Antonescu also allowed the return of Jews expelled from Bessarabia and Bukovina. In 1944, the Romanian government even provided a refuge for Jews, threatened with deportation and certain death, from Northern Transylvania and Hungary proper. These measures were not motivated by a change of heart or a sense of guilt or any other humanitarian consideration. Romanian leaders recognized that the Nazis might lose the war, and they wanted to use the surviving Jewish population as pawns in their negotiations with the Western allies.

Competition between Hungary and Slovakia for Hitler’s good will was equally intense, and it produced similar results. Budapest sought Hitler’s support to restore Hungarian control over the entire Slovakia; the Slovaks, on the other hand, sought protection in Berlin against their southern neighbour. Until 1943, Berlin had no reason to complain, especially when it came to Slovak compliance with Nazi policy on the so-called Jewish question. In 1940 and 1941, in a series of legislations, the clerical-fascist regime in Bratislava created a racial state, destroyed Jewish livelihood and even introduced the yellow star. In May 1942, the Slovak parliament accepted the expulsion of the Jews (the only person who voted against the measure was the leader of the Hungarian minority party, Count János Esterházy). As a sign of their total compliance with the Nazis, the Slovak government even paid the Germans 500 marks for every Slovak Jew deported. During their meeting on April 22, 1943, Prime Minister Jozef Tiso assured the German dictator that he and the Slovak people would not rest until the last Jew was deported from their country. Hungary, on the other hand, Tiso told Hitler, “has become Europe’s ghetto.” Hitler, in his turn, made fun of Regent Horthy’s apology that Hungarian Jews might have been treated too harshly in the labour service.

By the spring of 1943, Tiso’s boast began to ring hollow. Chastised by the Vatican and threatened by the Catholic hierarchy at home, the Slovak government, like its Romanian counterpart, slowed down the deportation of the Jews in the fall of 1942. The Nazis suspected foul play, and, to better assess the situation, they dispatched SS Brigadeführer Edmund Veessenmayer to Bratislava in the late spring of 1943. In the Slovak capital, Veessenmayer raised the issue of deportation to gauge Tiso’s and his colleagues’ attitude towards Germany: significantly, to Veessenmayer and the Nazi elite, the willingness to deport Jews remained the surest sign of loyalty to the Third Reich. But the dice had been already cast: soon
after the visit, on June 6, 1943, the Conference of Slovak Bishops denounced the persecution of the Jews in an open letter. Still, for the next ten months, Tiso and his colleagues continued to raise the issue of the “Hungarian aberration” to curry favour with, and calm the suspicions of, the Nazi dictator.74

Although the German occupation of Hungary led to a drastic change in Hungarian foreign policy in March 1944, competition with the neighbouring states continued until the end of the war and beyond. In June 1944, the Hungarian government reacted nervously to the news that the Romanians had made a deal with the Roosevelt administration to allow Hungarian Jews to enter their country and give permission to Romanian Jews to emigrate to Palestine in large numbers.75 The new Sztójay government also took the Slovak racial laws, particularly the anti-Jewish legislation of July 2, 1942, as its model to regulate the emigration and deportation of Jews. Thus the new Hungarian legislation permitted certain categories of converts, Jews with “Aryan” spouses, and professionals working in jobs deemed vital to the war effort to remain in the country.76 Foreign governments and dignitaries were aware of the competition between Hungary and its neighbours, and tried to exploit it to save lives. One of the earliest and strongest critics of the deportation, the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Angelo Rotta, appealed to both the vanity of the Hungarian elite and their paranoia about the neighbouring states. In May 1944, he told Sztójay that Hungary’s good reputation as a Christian country and the shield of Western civilization would be permanently damaged, if he persisted with the deportations. The Nuncio also warned the Hungarian leaders that the “enemies of their country” would not miss the opportunity exploit the situation, and accuse Hungary, once again, of using Bolshevik methods.77 Besides the intense pressure from the Anglo-Saxon powers, Sweden, Switzerland and international organizations, such as the Red Cross, the fear of being overtaken by Romanians, the Slovaks and the Bulgarians played an important role in the decision of Horthy and the conservative political elite to halt the deportations in early July. Horthy’s intervention came too late the save the lives of provincial Jews and the country’s reputation. On August 23, Romania switched sides. In a few months, King Michael and his advisors were able to accomplish what Horthy and the Hungarian political elite had tried but could not do for two years: they forged an alliance among the army, the civil service, the political opposition and the population to depose the pro-Nazi government and liberate the capital from German occupation. The successful coup
decided the outcome of the long competition between Romania and Hungary. In return for military assistance, the Soviet Union and the Western powers promised to recognize Romanian sovereignty over the whole of Transylvania—a promise which they kept after the war.

The Road to the German Occupation of the Country

In his memoirs published in American exile in the 1950s, Prime Minister Miklós Kállay cited five reasons why he and his government wanted to leave the Axis camp: to save the country from the worst effects of the war; to forestall a German invasion; to prevent a right-wing coup, which would have led to the destruction of the Left and the genocide of Jews; to avert a Russian occupation and to keep the territories obtained with German and Italian help. He and his government, Kállay argued, let more than one hundred thousand Jewish refugees enter the country; provided legal protection for Hungarian Jews living in Nazi Germany; refused to introduce the yellow star, rebuffed German demands to hand over 300,000 Jews as slave labourers and declined to set up ghettos as the first step towards deportation. By surrendering the Jews to their fate, he continued, Hungary would have sunk to the level of Nazi Germany’s satellites in the region, such as Slovakia, Romania and Croatia. Full compliance with the German demands would have not dissuaded the Nazis from invading Hungary; it would have, however, significantly strengthened the hands of the anti-Semitic Right, and it would have alienated “every honest person” from the government. After the Jews, the Nazis would have demanded the surrender and elimination of “Socialists, left-wingers, pro-Jewish Gentiles, Anglophiles and, indeed, the whole Hungarian elite.”

Historians have been generally sceptical in accepting Kállay’s self-image as a protector of liberty and civil rights and a defender of Jews. Lacking a strong power base even in his own party, Prime Minister Kállay, they have argued, made too many concessions to the anti-Semitic Right. He was the one who put the Third Anti-Jewish Law into effect and unnecessarily humiliated Hungarian Jews by downgrading Judaism from a “received” (established) to a “recognized” faith. The Kállay government did not allow Jewish men to serve in regular army units but conscripted them into labour battalions. In November 1943, it nationalized more than one million holds of Jewish-owned land. Kállay protected parliamentary institutions and kept the press relatively free; yet he also tolerated anti-Semitic agitation in the chambers of the parliament, on the streets and in
More recently, Krisztián Ungváry and László Karsai have questioned, if not Kállay’s courage, at least his argument that he and his government had taken unprecedented risks by opposing the Nazis in 1942. The Nazi government allegedly paid little attention to Hungary and Hungarian Jews in 1942. Eager to complete the Polish and Soviet phase of the Holocaust, the Nazis’ goal in Hungary in the second half of 1942 and early 1943 was to place more restrictions on Jews and prepare the ground for their eventual deportation. Hitler and his advisors allegedly began to put more pressure on Kállay and his government only in the fall; yet as late as December of 1942, Berlin still did not react strongly to Kállay’s rejections of Nazi demands. At least some of the messages had nothing to do with the Nazi regime; rather they came from the Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, Döme Sztójay, who tried to anticipate the wishes of the German government. In any case, Tamás Stark contends, Kállay’s attempt to save Jewish lives was motivated by political interests, such as the desire to gain the goodwill of Great Britain and the United States, rather than by the principled rejection of violent antisemitism.

The Kállay government’s refusal to hand over Hungarian Jews was motivated by practical diplomatic rather than ideological or humanitarian considerations. Yet, Hitler and his advisors perceived non-cooperation on this vital concern as a heresy. In October 1942, the Hungarian government rejected the Nazi demand to withdraw Jews of Hungarian citizenship from the Third Reich, introduce the yellow star, set up ghettos, and hand over 300,000 Jews for labour service in Ukraine. Kállay told the Germans that the Hungarian state could not force its citizens to “undertake work abroad” and the country, too, was not in the position to dispense with the skill and labour of so many people in a time of war. In his December response to the same request, he argued the Hungarian government never doubted the pan-European nature of the so-called Jewish question. The Hungarians were pioneers: it was they who passed the first anti-Semitic legislation in Europe in the early 1920s. The Budapest government was determined to reduce Jewish influence, but only on the basis of its interests and cultural and political traditions. The anti-Jewish laws passed since 1938, Kállay argued, had eliminated Jews from the realm of culture and they had also seriously curtailed their influence over economic life; further restrictions in this area, in fact, the Prime Minister contended, would only endanger industrial production and harm the common war effort. Kállay also rejected the Nazi demand to introduce the yellow star. Given the high number of Jews in Budapest and the strong anti-Semitic feeling of certain
segments of the population, he argued, such measures would lead to anti-Jewish riots. Finally, Hungary lacked the capacity and the technical expertise to deport so many people in a relatively short period of time. Half measures, on the other hand, would lead to chaos and civil war, which the government could not afford.  

Both the tone and substance of these letters and cables could not but anger Hitler and his advisors, who considered the lack of cooperation in the Jewish genocide as a sure sign of betrayal. As we have seen, both the Romanian and Slovak governments were opposed to further deportation in 1943 and 1944; yet the Nazis vented their anger openly only on the Hungarians. During his meeting with the Regent on April 16 and 17 of 1943, Hitler went out of his way to insult the elderly statesman. He spoke disparagingly about the performance of Hungarian troops in the winter campaign and the loyalty of the Kállay government. He told Horthy that Berlin had learned about the secret contacts between the Kállay government and the Western Allies, and that he would never let Kállay and his ilk backstab Germany by concluding a separate peace with the enemy. In almost the same breath, he accused Hungary of sabotaging the German effort to “solve the Jewish question.” With Sweden and Switzerland, Hitler raved, Hungary remained the only country in Europe that ignored the Jewish menace; instead of taking energetic actions to neutralize this pan-European threat, Hungary became a veritable haven for foreign Jews. Insulted on every level, Horthy responded that he and his government had done everything humanly possible to address the so-called Jewish question; however, he could not simply “club them to death” (agyonütni). To add insult to injury, the Regent confessed that he felt bad enough to have sent 36,000 Jewish labourers, the majority of whom had most likely died, to the Eastern front.  

The meeting marked a turning point in Hungarian-German relations. In his April report, Edmund Veesenmayer, Nazi expert on Hungary, argued that a “Jewish-clerical-aristocratic clique” formed around Regent Horthy opposed the German war effort at every turn. After April 1943, Nazi Germany no longer considered Hungary a friendly state. The coup against Mussolini at the end of July 1943, and the Italian armistice with the Allies in September put the behaviour of the Hungarian government an in even more unfavourable light. The Nazis fully expected that the Kállay government would use the first opportunity to leave the Axis. The relationship had soured so much that for almost a year the German ambassador, on the instruction of his superiors in Berlin, refused to have any direct contact
with the Hungarian Prime Minister or any of his colleagues. Thus, when, in the summer of 1943, the Nazis demanded the removal of the pro-British Minister of Defence, General Vilmos Nagy, they submitted their request to Prime Minister Kállay indirectly through Filippo Anfuso, the Italian Ambassador in Budapest. By October 1933, the Nazi regime decided to take action against Kállay. Veessenmayer conducted negotiation with the various fascist parties, such as Hungarian party of Renewal, László Baky’s National Socialist Party and Szálasi’s Arrow Cross to remove the Kállay government in a coup and grab power. However, tensions among the radical right-wing parties condemned the German attempt to depose the legitimate government of Hungary with the help of their local allies to failure. 87

Veessenmayer and his superiors in Berlin did not give up, however. In his next report on December 10, 1943, the Nazi expert delivered a devastating critique not only of the Kállay government but also of Hungary and its social and political elite. The letter is of great interest, because the Nazi expert repeated almost verbatim the prejudices that Hitler and his closest advisors harboured towards the Hungarians. 88 Like Hitler, Veessenmayer described Hungarians as a “non-Aryan,” lazy, domineering and culturally sterile race. Everything in Hungary, from bridges, public buildings in Budapest to classical music and poetry, he argued, were the work of Slavs and assimilated, mainly German, immigrants. Hungarians were posers, braggarts, rebels, obstructionists and saboteurs — and completely useless as soldiers. Because of their eastern origins, the Magyars, Veessenmayer continued, had always been favourably exposed towards Jews. The archenemy recognized and took full advantage of their hosts’ instinctive philo-Semitism, and soon enough, Jews had come to control the economic, cultural and political life of Hungary. There are, the SS Brigadeführer contended, 1.1 million Jews in Hungary and at least two million Magyars are economically depended on them. The Jews and their allies in Hungary maintained an excellent intelligence system, and hindered the war effort at every turn. The Third Reich has tolerated the existence of this center of sabotage too long. Until appropriate measures are taken, the German press has to increase the pressure on the Kállay government by keeping its weak handling of the “Jewish question” in the limelight; at the same time, the Third Reich government should give “the national opposition” in Hungary more support. The Regent should be manipulated through the threat of Habsburg restoration and the peril of Russian occupation, and by making promises that his “Court Jews”
(Hofjuden) would not be harmed. In the case of a popular uprising, the techniques which had been used with great effectiveness in 1919 should be employed to restore order again.  

Veesenmayer’s recommendations suggest that the decision to attack Hungary had not yet been taken in December: the SS Brigadeführer was only “working towards” Hitler, repeating his prejudices and anticipating his moves. Hitler and his military advisors seem to have made the decision to occupy Hungary on the basis of false intelligence in February 1944: the British and the Americans led the Germans to believe that an Allied attack through the Ljubljana Gap in the Julian Alps to Vienna and Budapest was imminent in early spring. To preclude any surprises on the part of Hungary, which could have endangered the link to Romania, Germany’s most important source of oil, the Nazis decided to act. Hitler ordered his military men to commence with Operation Margarethe on March 12, 1944. The desire to exploit the country’s economic resources, including its manpower, cheaply and more efficiently and to introduce badly needed social reforms may have also contributed the Nazi decision to invade Hungary. Some of Hungary’s military leaders, such as Géza Lakatos were convinced that Hitler ordered the invasion of the county in order to gain access to its military resources, which he wanted to use to close a strategic gap and hinder the advance Red Army. The fourth reason for the occupation was the Nazi obsession with the so-called Jewish Question. After the battles of Stalingrad, the only conflict that the Nazis could realistically expect to win was their war on the Jews. Since Operation Reinhard, the murder of the Polish Jews, had almost been completed by October 1943, the Third Reich could now turn its attention to Hungary and the Hungarian Jews. Which of the four reasons was the most important is difficult to determine: in the Nazi mind, they were inseparable and reinforced one another. The Crown Council protocol, prepared on the basis of Horthy’s report on the day of the occupation, cited Kállay government’s contacts with the Western allies and its allegedly inadequate handling of “the Jewish question” as the reasons for the German invasion.

Conclusions

Questioned by the President of the Court at the Sztójay trial on March 13 1946 if “the solution of the Jewish question was an exclusively German demand, or the demand was raised by the Hungarian government or it was a shared demand,” the Hungarian expert and Plenipotentiary of the Third
Reich in Hungary, Edmund Veesenmayer, told the court that “it was first and foremost a German wish, and I am convinced that had it been left to the Hungarians, they would have solved it differently. The measures that they would have adopted, likely, would have been limited to making the First Jewish Laws more rigorous. No doubt, this form [of the solution of the so-called Jewish Question, BB] can be lead back to German pressure.”

As we have seen, Veesenmayer had a very low opinion of Hungarians: like Hitler, he dismissed them as posers, braggarts, lazy, intellectually sterile, cowardly, domineering and bloodthirsty aliens: as ethnic outsiders, who had no place in “Aryan” and German-dominated Europe. Eager to save his own skin, this technocrat and arrogant Nazi, who resembled in many ways Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Nazi Criminal Police, was always ready to push the responsibility for the Jewish genocide on others. Thanks to his talent as a manipulator, and to the gullibility of his prosecutors, this mass-murderer was never punished for his crimes. His post-war life and career was rather typical: the majority of high-ranking Nazis who had pillaged Greece and participated in the massacre of thousands of civilians also escaped justice in West-Germany. The fanatical Nazi never forgot, and continued to resent the fact, that the Kállay government, and the conservative segment of the political elite in general, had refused to be drawn into the Jewish genocide. Between 1938 and 1943, the Hungarian political elite sought to adjust their country’s foreign and domestic policy to the requirements of the Axis alliance. Much of this adjustment was voluntary and unconscious: the result of self-‘coordination’ (Gleichschaltung), rather than yielding to direct German demands. The conservative political elite understood the complex relationship between foreign and domestic policies: they were aware of the connection between the threat posed by the Third Reich from without and the danger represented by Hungarian national socialists and their fellow travelers from within. The anti-Jewish laws passed in this period were the product of self-Gleichschaltung: an attempt to deflate right-wing agitation, reduce social tensions and curry favours with Berlin.

With the war turning sour for the Third Reich, and with the mounting Hungarian casualties, the conservative elite also began to have second thoughts about the Nazi alliance. While not free of antisemitic prejudices, Hungarian conservatives never shared the Nazis’ biological racism and their murderous hatred for the Jews. Having learned about the mass executions in Poland and the Soviet Union, Kállay and his colleagues
repeatedly rebuffed the Nazis’ attempt to drag the country into the genocide. On the other hand, the conservatives’ sympathy for the Jews was limited; their contempt for the Nazis was never strong enough to change their minds about the importance of the German alliance. As students of the nineteenth-century *Realpolitik*, Kállay and his colleagues continued to subordinate human-right issues to winning the war and revising the borders. It was also not beneath the dignity of Kállay and his colleagues, or by the same token that of their Slovak and Romanian counterparts, to use the so-called Jewish Question to manipulate the Western powers. By providing more protection for labour servicemen and rejecting the German demand to hand over their Jewish compatriots, the Kállay government wanted to attract British American attention and support. By treating Jews more humanly, it sought to establish trust between Budapest and the Western capitals, as a first way towards leaving the war or changing sides. Second, Horthy’s conservative advisors hoped that their lenient handling of the so-called Jewish Question would pay off at the negotiating table after the war: the survival of Hungarian Jews would lead to a more equitable peace treaty at the end of the war — a treaty that would leave parts of Transylvania and Slovakia under Hungarian control.

In 1943 most observers realized that Nazi Germany could not win the war. However, it was still possible that the Soviets would make a deal with Hitler, and that the war would end with a negotiated settlement, which would leave Hungary in the German sphere of influence. Determined to avoid the fate of Poland and Yugoslavia, the Hungarian political elite was prepared to switch sides only after British and American troops had landed in the Balkans and Allied troops had entered Hungarian territory or approached the country’s borders. The Allies tried to convince Hungary to take a more courageous step: to leave the Nazi alliance and declare war on Germany, even if such a rebellion had little chance of success. Eager to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, Kállay and his colleagues predictably refused to lay everything on one card. In the end, their clumsy attempt to forge ties with the Allies cost them the trust of Nazi Germany; their manifest timidity, on the other hand, prevented them for gaining the friendship and support of the Allies.

Based on the principles and practice of nineteenth-century *Realpolitik*, the Kállay government’s foreign policy was too complicated and too cautious to inspire trust in the European capitals. In the ‘age of extreme,’ ideological extremism, fanaticism, and devotion to a social and political system rather than shared geopolitical interests, formed the basis
of alliances. Their hesitation to embrace fully Nazi anti-Semitism and get involved in the genocide was bound to anger Hitler and his associates. Unskilled in the game of ‘gangster politics’ as practiced by Hitler and Stalin, Kállay and his colleagues piled on mistakes, one after another, acting as if they had wanted to provoke Berlin. By refusing to recognize the fascist Salò Republic in the fall of 1943, for example, the Kállay government not only showed its colors: given Hitler’s well-known attachment to the Duce, such hesitation was rightly perceived in Berlin as an offense, and it invited retaliation. The Hungarian elites needed the Wehrmacht to slow down the Russian advance, and defend the country’s eastern frontiers. Yet they not only refused to make any major contribution to the German military effort on the Eastern Front after Stalingrad; to add insult to injury, Horthy also asked for the withdrawal of Hungarian troops from Soviet soil in early 1944. Against the background of the poorly hidden negotiations with the Western powers, such a request was bound to increase Hitler’s and his advisors’ suspicion: even less paranoid politicians than Hitler would have perceived such request as a sure sign of betrayal.

Hitler and his associates always perceived radical antisemitism and support for the genocide as the litmus test of loyalty to the Third Reich. Contradicting Hitler on the so-called Jewish Question and criticizing, not to mention opposing, the Nazi-led genocide was bound to provoke a strong response from the Dictator. The Kállay government’s policy towards Jews angered everyone and satisfied no one. The anti-Semitic laws passed under the Kállay government were meant to undercut support for the radical parties. However, they only emboldened ideologues, and wetted the appetite of opportunists eager to line their pockets at the Jews’ expense. Their protestation of loyalty and ideological purity notwithstanding, Kállay and his colleagues could not dispel Nazi suspicion. The Nazis predictably perceived the Hungarian plea for independence as a veiled attempt by a satellite state to distance itself from the Third Reich, and claim moral superiority vis-à-vis its master. Kállay’s promise to Hitler in January 1944 to deport foreign Jews failed to postpone the German invasion; it also showed the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of conservative foreign policy. The loss of Hitler’s trust explains why the Nazi leaders pushed for the ‘total’ solution of the so-called Jewish Question in Hungary rather than in Romania or Slovakia. Both satellites had a history of collaborating with the Nazis in the Jewish genocide; yet the Nazis judged the political situation in these countries as relatively stable, and the influence of the surviving Jewish population on the political
elite as negligible. It was only in Hungary, where philosemitism and the opposition to the war, the protection of the Jews and the desire to leave the Axis, seem to have gone hand-in-hand. To the Nazis at least, the survival of the Jewish community in Hungary was no longer an ideological issue; its very existence came to be perceived as a security threat.

The success of Kállay’s foreign policy was dependent, to some degree, on the state’s protection of Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian conservatives were not alone in perceiving such a linkage, however: Hitler and his advisors, too, were convinced that the survival of Hungarian Jews and the country’s leaving the Axis camp were intimately connected. Kállay and his colleagues wanted to use Jews as bargaining chips with the Western powers during and after the war. The Nazis, on the other hand, thought that it was the Jews who pulled all the strings; who sabotaged war production; prevented the full exploitation of the country by the Nazis, and wanted to take Hungary out of the war. The Kállay government sought to exploit the survival of the Jewish community to regain its freedom of manoeuvre in foreign policy. Berlin, on the other hand, had come to view the continued existence of a one-million strong Jewish community in Hungary as an imminent security threat. By tying the fate of Jews to the success of its foreign policy, the Kállay government unwillingly hastened the demise of the largest surviving Jewish community in East-Central Europe.

On March 19, 1944, the Wehrmacht occupied Hungary. The population and the armed forces of the Hungarian state put up no resistance. What would have happened if Horthy and his ministers had decided to resist was hotly debated after the war. Had the Hungarian units or the people resisted, Sztójay argued during his trial, the German Army, assisted by the neighbouring states, would have still occupied the land. The Romanian troops, for the second time, would have ransacked Budapest, and Hungary would have disappeared from the map. There would have been still plenty of Hungarians who would have helped the Nazis to deport the Jews, or shot them on the spot. On the other hand, Holocaust historians, such as László Karsai, believe that, by not resigning from his post, Regent Horthy helped to legitimize the Nazi occupation, the puppet Sztójay government and the anti-Jewish laws that it issued in the spring of 1944. Without a smoothly functioning state and the help and the local ‘know-how’ of tens of thousands of administrators and rural policemen, the Germans and their Hungarian stooges would not have been able to carry out the deportation. Active or even passive resistance, combined with
the rapid disintegration of the state would have seriously hindered the Nazi effort to complete the genocide. It was not an accident that the majority of Hungarian Jews were deported and killed in the spring of 1944 under the Sztójay government (in which conservatives still held the majority of the posts) rather than in the autumn and winter of 1944, under Ferenc Szálasi’s dreaded Arrow-Cross regime. The erratic and somewhat unstable Szálasi, paradoxically, was far less willing to comply with Hitler’s wishes than the more rational and bureaucratically-minded Sztójay; more importantly, Karsai argues, political and social chaos, the demoralization of civil servants and the retreat of the state made the collection and transportation of Jews out of the country in the final phase of the war much more difficult. Had the conservatives resisted, chaos and inefficiency, which characterized the Nazi effort in the fall and winter of 1944 would have set in much earlier; the genocide could not have been prevented, but the number of victims would have been much lower. But not only Hungarian Jews, but the country as a whole may have suffered less damage, and fewer deaths. There would have less resistance to the Soviet invasion, and the battle for Hungary would have been shorter and less devastating. Horthy’s refusal to accept the occupation and early resistance to the Nazi invasion would have turned the country into a victim of Nazi aggression, and the country could have been ended up on the winning side of the war.

The Hungarian phase of the Holocaust has been historically explained either as a result of home-grown antisemitism and social tensions or as a product of the war and the German occupation. This article has looked at the origins of genocide from a foreign-policy perspective: against the background of a struggle between irredentism and independence. The Hungarian political elite sought out the friendship of the Third Reich in order to undo the Treaty of Trianon, improve the status of their state and perhaps recapture some of the glory of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire. The conservative political elite, which controlled foreign policy, considered Nazi Germany as Hungary’s natural ally; although they had misgivings about German domestic policy, their desire to regain the lost provinces exceeded their distaste for Nazi rule. Until 1942, the alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had paid off: by 1942, the Budapest government restored, with Hitler’s approval, Hungarian sovereignty over the southern part of Slovakia, Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, the northern sections of Yugoslavia and Northern Transylvania. These successes, however, came with a price; the gradual loss of independence. Although the country had almost doubled in size between 1938 and 1942,
its standing in the world declined drastically. In 1938, Trianon Hungary was still regarded as a sovereign state; by 1942, the world perceived it as a satellite of the Third Reich. Hungary needed peace more than ever before to solve pressing social problems; yet by 1942, it had found itself at war with the largest and most powerful nations in the world. The lesson that the political elite had drawn from the First World War was that they had to preserve the integrity of the military forces until the end to prevent the outbreak of a revolution and forestall foreign occupation. Yet, by February 1943, the Horthy regime had sacrificed an entire army on the altar of German alliance. The Hungarian political elite hoped that the revision of the borders would bring stability to the region; yet two Vienna Awards only increased tensions between Hungary and its neighbours. Isolated internationally and hated by its neighbours, after 1941 Hungary grew more dependent on Nazi Germany for protection, especially against the better equipped and much larger Romanian Army. The desire to keep the regained territories and the fear of Romanian invasion help to explain why Hungary remained in the Axis camp in 1943 and 1944.

The close alliance with Nazi Germany had serious domestic implications as well. The shifting of the center of political life to the Right, a process that had started around 1932, gained momentum after the outbreak of the war in 1939. Nazi Germany was only indirectly responsible for the anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary between 1938 and 1943. However, it is highly unlikely that, perhaps with the exception of the first one, that any these laws would have been passed, had the Third Reich not become Hungary’s patron and most important ally. The physical ad political proximity of Nazi Germany emboldened the extreme Right, which, overrepresented in the parliament, pushed for more stringent measures to marginalize Jews and prepare the ground for their deportation. The Kállay government not only enforced earlier laws and created new ones: it also failed to stop the anti-Semitic agitation in the press, in the schools and on the streets. By early 1944, the country had become hopelessly polarized; the leftist and democratic parties opposed the war and denounced the persecution of the Jews; yet these parties either lacked mass support, or had no influence over the conservative elite, the armed forces and the state bureaucracy. The regime’s right wing opponents were also divided; yet they were stronger than its supporters, and they had come to dominate public opinion on the so-called Jewish Question. They were particularly popular among military officers, rural policemen and pro-
vincial administrators, all of whom were destined to play an important role in the Holocaust.

On March 18, 1944, Horthy made a deal with Hitler: he promised to remain in power in order to avoid chaos and prevent resistance. The Regent hoped that, by keeping the Army under his control he might be able to influence political events, and perhaps even switch sides. Hitler seems to have promised him to end the occupation, withdraw his Gestapo agents, and stop the arrest of oppositional politicians and public figures soon after a pro-German government had been formed and the so-called Jewish Question had been solved to his liking: the dictator promised independence in exchange for Jewish lives. Horthy honoured his side of the bargain: the next two three months, he watched the unfolding of the tragedy of Hungarian Jews from the sidelines, refusing to get involved, despite the urging of some of his trusted conservative advisors to restrain his underlings and save lives. Post-war trial documents suggest that the Regent thought that the Nazis and their local allies were determined to settle the so-called Jewish Question in their own way, and that he was powerless to prevent it. Clearly, Horthy saw himself and his country as a victim of Nazi aggression, and hoped that Western governments would share his view. Instead of ordering state secretary in the Ministry of the Interior, László Baky, to stop the deportation, he thus pleaded with his underling, and Nazi informer, to exempt scientists, war heroes, capitalists, assimilated wealthy Jews and converts from the deportation. The Regent clearly overestimated Hitler’s power in Hungary, and what the Gestapo and the German army of occupation could accomplish without the support of Hungarian administrators and policemen. More importantly, however, he felt bound by the agreement that he had made with the Dictator on the eve of the invasion. Hitler, predictably, failed to honour his word: the Gestapo agents not only remained in the country, but also continued to arrest dissidents and terrorize the population. Incensed by the Nazi betrayal, Horthy sent a letter to the Führer in early June 1944, reminding him of his promises. Skilled in the game of ‘gangster diplomacy’ as practised imperial states, Hitler did not even give him an answer. The Regent thought that, by remaining in office, he, as Hadir (Commander-in-Chief) could prevent unnecessary bloodshed and keep the army under his control. However, in the spring and summer, he was forced to send hundreds of thousands of poorly armed Hungarian soldiers to the front; the units dispatched to the frontline fell under German command. By October
1944, there were an insufficient number of reliable troops under Horthy’s control to affect a switch of alliance.¹⁰⁴

Between 1919 and 1944, Hungarian diplomacy pursued two goals: the revision of the borders and the preservation of national sovereignty. In the first stage of the war, irredentism, i.e. the narrow focus on re-gaining lost territories, led the political elite and the country into a trap from which Hungary was not able to escape. In March 1944, the same elite walked into a second trap: the snarl of independence. It was a trap because in the given circumstances, independence, even if Hitler had fulfilled his promises, would have been nothing more than a chimera, and a cover for Nazi hegemony. The foreign policy-mistakes of the Hungarian governments from Pál Teleki to Döme Sztójay paved the way for the German and Russian occupations, and the genocide of Hungarian Jews.

NOTES


⁶ György Réti, Hungarian-Italian Relations in the Shadow of Hitler’s Germany, 1933-1940 (Boulder Col.: Social Science Monographs, 2003), 283-287.


⁸ The Nazis had no interest in restoring or creating a large state of 21 million inhabitants along their border. See ⁷th Report (7. Számú tájékoztató), November 20, 1943, Budapest, in A szakadék szélén: az MIT bizalmas jelentési
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9 Ignác Romsics, Hungary in the Twentieth Century (Budapest: Corvina/Osiris, 1999), 197-199.


14 Romsics, Hungary in the Twentieth Century, 200-201; on the fate of the German minority, see Norbert Spannenberger, Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1944 unter Horthy und Hitler (Munich: Oldenburg, 2002).


16 Andor Jaross’ testimony. “Endre László és társai,” Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levétára (ÁBTL), V-79802/3a, 80.


22 Katzburg, Zsidópolitika Magyarországon, 151-153.

31 On the Voronezh tragedy see Krisztián Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* (Budapest: Osiris, 2005).
33 Iván Fekete, “Horthy Környezetében Feltételezett Magasabb Rangú Tisztek Jellemzése,” in *Vallomások a Holtak Házból*, ed. Haraszi, 443-459; Pro-Nazi officers tended to be younger than their pro-British counterparts; they had graduated from the Military Academy and the Ludovika Academy in Hungary in the 1920s and 30s rather than from similar institutions in Austria before the war.
34 Kádár, *A Ludovikától Sopronkőhídig*, p. 316.
36 Secret Report, Bánffy, Divison Head, Foreign Ministry, to Foreign Minister, July 5, 1939, 43/10 1939/43/7, in Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Országos Levéltár or MOL), K63, 1940-1943, 413 csomó, 43 tétel, pp. 48-49.
37 Secret Report, Bánffy, Division Head, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Csáky, Foreign Minister, October 2, 1940, K63 5543/1940/43, in MOL, K63 413 csomó, 1940-1944. 43 tétel, pp. 1-4.
38 Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011), 256-258; Tamás Majszai, “A körüls-
41 See Gyurgyák, A zsidókérdes Magyarországon, 172-173.
42 After the war, many claimed that the small and poorly armed Hungarian Army had been in no position to resist the battle-hardened and well-equipped Wehrmacht units. This was, as military historian Peter Gosztony has pointed out, not true; the Hungarian Army was modern enough to tie down significant German forces for weeks. Peter Gosztony, “Hungary’s Army in the Second World War,” in György Ránki ed., Hungarian History – World History (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), 221-258.
43 Ormos, Magyarország a két világháború korában, 232-246.
45 They were not the only one. More powerful countries, such as France also tried to find their places in Nazi-dominated Europe. See Robert Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
46 Kádár, A Ludovikától Sopronkőhidáig, 303.
49 For a survey of the region’s problems on the eve of the Second World War, see Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-22.
50 Joó, Kállay Miklós külpolitikája, 127-128; 152-153.
51 Paradoxically, both Maniu and the liberal leader Constantin Brătianu, supported the Romanian invasion of the Soviet Union, and Antonescu’s policy of “first eastwards, by brute force, then westwards, at the green table or by the sword,” see Jean Ancel, The History of the Holocaust in Romania (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 176-177.
52 Secret Reports, August 11, 1943, MOL, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, K 64-1943-27-409, 143-152.
54 German Ambassy’s Confidential Report on the meeting of the Foreign Relations’ Committee held on June 11, 1942; June (?), 1942, in Ránki ed., A Wilhelmsstrasse és Magyarország, 664-665.
56 Memorandum prepared by Woermann, Head of the South-Eastern European Department in the Foreign Ministry on the occasion of Prime Minister Kállay’s visit, June 1, 1942, in Ránki ed., A Wilhelmsstrasse és Magyarország, p. 655.
57 Cable by Jagow, German Ambassodor in Budapest to German Foreign Ministry, June 12, 1942, in Ránki eds., A Wilhelmsstrasse és Magyarország, 661.
58 For the survey on Hitler’s role in Nazi foreign policy, see Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation (London: Arnold, 2001), 134-161.
63 Fenyo, Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary, 159.
64 Memorandum by Luther, Departmental Head in the Foreign Ministry, on the occasion of Prime Minister Kállay’s visit, June 3, 1942, in Ránki ed., A Wilhelmsstrasse és Magyarország, 660.
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65 Luther’s cable to Jagow, the German Ambassador in Budapest, October 8 1942, in Ránki ed., A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország, 698.

66 Luther’s cable to Jagow, the German Ambassador in Budapest, Berlin, October 14, 1942, in Ránki ed, A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország, 699-700.

67 Kállay, Hungarian Premier, 117-121.

68 Joó, Kállay Miklós külpolitikája, 122.

69 See Ancel, The History of the Holocaust in Romania, 486-509.

70 On the changes in Romanian-German relations, see Jean Ancel, “German-Romanian Relations during the Second World War,” in Randolph L. Braham ed., The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry (New York: Columbia University Press/ Social Science Monographs, 1994), 57-77; Ioanid, The Holocaust in Romania, 259-270.


72 Nr. 44. Hitler-Tiso, April 22, 1943, in Ránki, Hitler hatvannyolc tárgyalása, Vol. 2, II, 114-121.

73 Joó, Kállay Miklós külpolitikája, 123-124.

74 Ibid., 129.

75 The Prime Minister of Hungary, Döme Sztójay to the German Ambassador, Jungerth-Arnethy, June 1944, Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL), K 64 Politikai Osztály Rezervált Iratai, 1918-1944. 100. csomó, 1944, 43 tétel. Zsidó-kérdés.

76 Dr. Kuhl, the Hungarian Ambassador in Slovakia to Döme Sztójay, The Prime Minister of Hungary, May 17, 1944, MOL K 64 Politikai Osztály Rezervált Iratai, 1918-1944. 100. csomó, 1944, 43 tétel. Zsidó-kérdés.

77 The Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Angelo Rotta to General Döme Sztójay, the Prime Minister of Hungary, May 15, 1944, MOL, K 64 Politikai Osztály Rezervált Iratai, 1918-1944. 100. csomó, 1944, 43 tétel. Zsidó-kérdés.

78 Kállay, Hungarian Premier, 349-352.

79 Ibid., 121-124


94 Hitler allegedly told Horthy that he and his government did not do enough to solve the so-called Jewish question; he also mentioned that Finland had only 6,000 Jews and they still had done incredible damage to the Axis alliance. Protokol of the Crown Council, Budapest, March 19, 1944, Lajos Kerekes ed., *Allianz Hitler-Horthy-Mussolini. Dokumente zur Ungarischen Außenpolitik (1933-1944)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), 368-375;

95 Karsai and Molnár, eds. *A magyar*, 459.


97 He spent only two years in prison between 1949 and 1951. Veessenmayer died as a respectable citizen in democratic West Germany in the late 1970s. On his life and career see Igor-Philip Matic, *Edmund Veesenmayer. Agent und Diplomat der nationalsozialistischen Expansionspolitik* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2002).
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98 See Mark Mazower, Griechenland under Hitler. Das leben während der deutschen Besatzung 1941-1944 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2016).


100 László Karsai, Szálasi Ferenc: Politikai életrajz (Budapest: Balassi, 2016). In the so-called Braham debate, the participants sought to address the issue: what would have happened if Horthy and the state had resisted. For the summary of the debate see Judit Molnár, Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőr-kerületben (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1995), 15-16, cited by Karsai and Molnár, A magyar Quisling-kormány, 55.

101 The question of what Horthy know, wanted to know or had to courage to acknowledge to know is still debated among Hungarian historians. Some think that that Regent was fooled to believe that the Jews were taken to work in the Third Reich. After the truth had become known, at the end of June, about Auschwitz and the deportation he got immediately involved to save the life of the Jews of Budapest. See Gábor Bencsik, Horthy Miklós. A kormányzó és kora (Budapest: Magyar Mercurius, 2001), esp. 79-92; Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai, Becsület és Kötelesség, I. Volum. (Budapest: Európa, 2003-2007), 324; For the critique of what many historians see as a new Horthy myth see Dávid Turbucz, “A Jobboldali Radikálisok Horthy Képe a Rendszerváltás Után,” in Bűvöpatakok mélyfűrások: Magyar Jobboldal -1945 után, ed. János M. Rainer (Budapest: Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár 1956-os Intézet Alapítvány, 2014), 249-273. Other think that Horthy had to know about the ongoing genocide, and adopted the ready-made justification, created by the Nazis, that the Jews were to be taken to Germany only to work as a excuse his inaction and shift responsibility onto others. See Géza Komoróczy, A Zsidók Története Magyarországon, Vol. 2: 1849-től A Jelenkorig (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2012), 701-724; Sakmyster, Admirális fehér lovon, 351-358; Gerlach and Götz, Az utolsó fejezet, 343-345. For the latest biography of Horthy see, Dávid Turbucz, Horthy Miklós (Budapest: Napvilág, 2011). For an overview on Horthy, see Péter Sipos, ‘Horthy Miklós személyisége és gondolkodásmódja,’” Rubicon, 2007/10, 57-61. For several historians’ opinion about Horthy, see Ignác Romsics, “Horthy képeink,” Mozgó Világ, 2007/ 30, 2-33. On his role in the genocide see “Történészek vitatkoznak Horthyról: ‘Nem tudta mi lessz a zsidósággal,’” HVG. 2012. július 31. http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120731_tortenesz_vita_horthy accessed March 10, 2015.


103 Horthy to Hitler, June 6, 1944, in Szinai ed., The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy, 304-306.

104 See General Géza Lakatos’s testimony in Karsai and Molnár, A magyar Quisling-kormány, 462-465.