

**Manufacturing Legitimacy:
The Czechoslovak Exile Government, 1938-1948**

by

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*In memory of my grandfather,
Bill Curtiss,
Williams College class of 1940*

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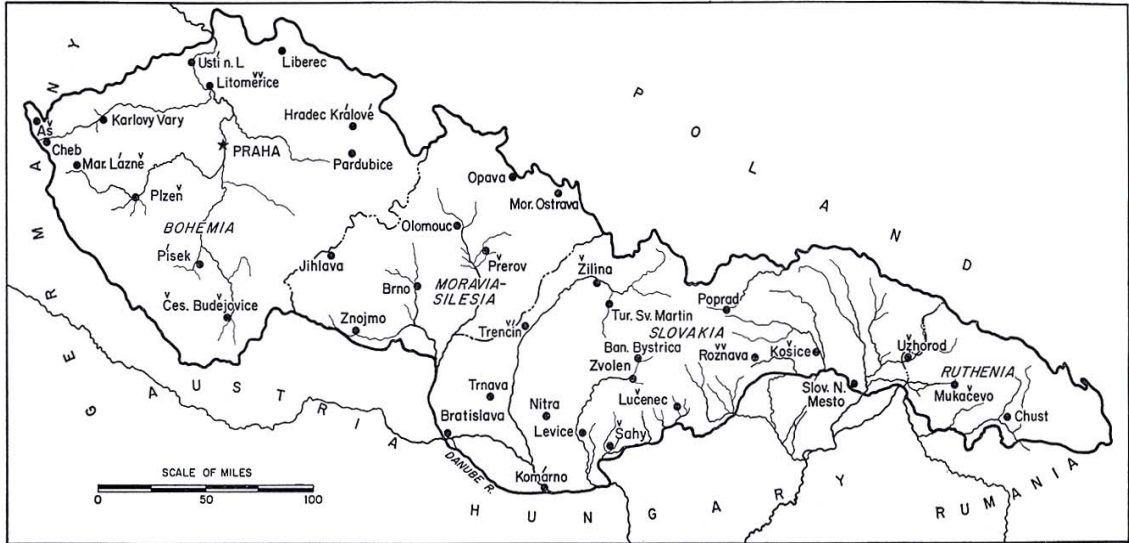
Acknowledgments

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I have undergone quite the journey over the past year with this work, from first drafting my hopelessly broad thesis proposal in a Prague café last spring, to spending part of my summer in the basement of the Hoover Institution Archives immersed in some truly remarkable World War II documents, to sitting in the first daunting meeting of the History Honors Seminar in September, to beginning to see finally the end in sight during spring break in March. For helping along on this journey, this work owes a great deal to the guidance of my advisor, Chris Waters, and I thank him for first putting the word “legitimacy” in my mouth back in September as well as for the invaluable help he has given me over the past months. I thank my friends for seeing so much less of me this year, and putting up with my long library binges. My fellow history thesis writers (yes, I guess you too Dan) have also provided invaluable support and a healthy community. Thank you Emily Bruce and Professor Goldberg for giving me great feedback in the early stages of my work. Thanks are also due to Katie Fleming for inhabiting a thesis state of mind with me, and to my parents for their support and for their generous photocopying assistance this summer.

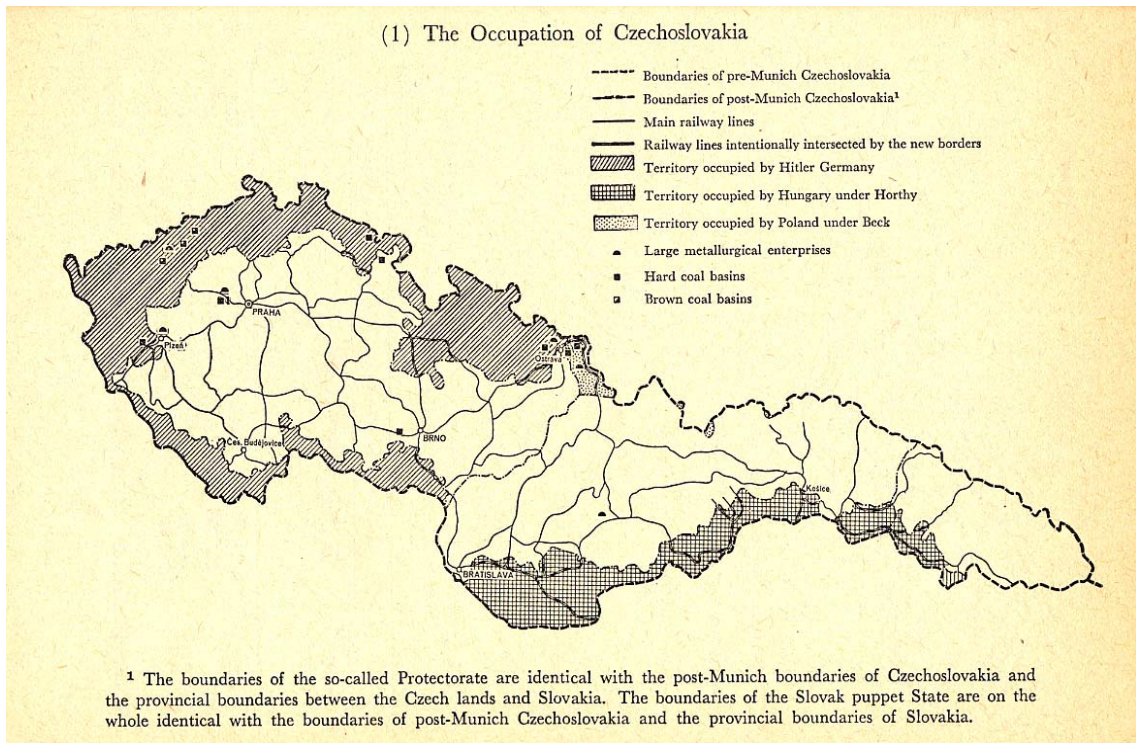
The story of Czechoslovakia is not really my story to tell, and I have tried to approach the telling as a respectful, though critical outsider. This history is very much still alive in the Czech and Slovak Republics today, and I hope my work does some justice to the remarkable lives of previous generations of Czechs and Slovaks, people who all lived through such tumultuous times.

Maps



1. The Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1938

Victor S. Mamatey and Radomir Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 2.



Jiří Doležal and Jan Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia's Fight: Documents of the Resistance Movement of the Czechoslovak People, 1938-1945* (Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1964), 123.

Introduction

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Josef Korbek, a Czechoslovak diplomat and academic, was forced to flee his home nation like so many of his countrymen on the eve of World War II. Taking refuge in London with much of the deposed Czechoslovak government, Korbek wrote of the fragile status of the political exile, the homeless politician:

Political émigrés are strange people. Uprooted from their national environment and deprived of a political base, they struggle among themselves for power. Often they cover their personal ambitions with high-sounding patriotic pronouncements; they dream and scheme, enter into constantly shifting coalitions and, in search of security, frequently find themselves with very strange bedfellows indeed. They must do all this not only without embarrassing the host country in its domestic or foreign affairs, but also without ever losing sight of their ultimate goal of returning home and resuming positions of leadership. Émigrés' motives are more patriotic than not, but their methods are inevitably tainted by their frustrated condition. An apt term had been coined for this condition in reference to the Russian émigrés after the October Revolution: *emigranshchina* ("émigré sickness"). Many of the Czechoslovak political émigrés were not immune to the disease.<sup>1</sup>

In a global power system of nation-states, political exiles who claim to represent the national will but lose control of their country's apparatus of governance and suddenly find themselves without a territorial base are thrust into an uncertain and precarious position. These political exiles have one ultimate goal: the eventual reacquisition of previously held positions of authority upon their return home. But the steps in achieving this objective are complicated by the competing interests of those remaining in the home country (both nationals and alien occupiers), by the conflicting desires of the exiled representatives themselves, and by the contending national self-interests of states the

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<sup>1</sup> Josef Korbek, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 185.

political exiles must look to for support. This convoluted system of competing national and international interests makes émigré diplomats struggle to keep their heads above water, desperately reaching out for some sort of recognition, some prospect of security. It was under this haze of “émigrés sickness” that the exiled Czechoslovak diplomats centered in London between 1939 and 1945 fought for the future of their fragile nation.

The underlying struggle for any government-in-exile is the quest for legitimacy. In order to guarantee safe return home to positions of leadership in an independent, stable Czechoslovakia, the exiled Czechoslovak government during World War II had to establish and maintain its legitimate status as an authentic representative of a sovereign nation. What exactly does “legitimacy” for a government-in-exile mean, though? What does it look like? How do self-proclaimed representatives of fractured or occupied nations gain the recognition and authority to speak for their countrymen? Who bestows legitimacy on exiled political organizations and what do these agents gain from supporting fairly powerless political bodies? What level of permanence do “legitimized” exiled organizations enjoy, and how are diplomatically validated governments-in-exile transformed into operationally coherent institutions of control? This study will examine the question of legitimacy vis-à-vis exiled politicians through an examination of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile during World War II: its struggles, its successes, its failures, and its ultimate dissolution.<sup>2</sup>

The state of Czechoslovakia was planted in fragile ground from its inception. It was criticized by many to be an artificial nation, a “polyglot and incoherent State” that

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<sup>2</sup> The adjectives “Czechoslovak” and “Czechoslovakian” are often interchanged for one another and have the same meaning. In this work the term “Czechoslovak” will be used, except in quotations that use “Czechoslovakian” originally.

incorporated in its borders historically separate territories and peoples: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and Ukrainians, “hundreds of thousands of protesting Magyars and millions of angry Germans.”<sup>3</sup> The country was pieced together out of several territories of the dismembered Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the conclusion of World War I: Bohemia, Moravia and parts of Silesia, which had been under Austrian control for the previous three hundred years, as well as Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, which had been ruled by the Hungarian crown for centuries. Uniting these diverse regions was a desire for self-determination and separation from Habsburg monarchical rule. The drive for Czechoslovakian independence was powered by a rebirth of Czech and Slovak nationalism before the war, and was steered forward by the emblematic, charismatic, and much loved Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the founding father and first president of the new democratic state. Masaryk led the campaign for national independence from exile in Western Europe during World War I and held together the fragile country in its first few years of existence largely through the sheer strength of his character and the great amount of respect he enjoyed, both from Czechoslovaks internally and from world leaders externally.<sup>4</sup>

Czechoslovakia prospered with relatively great social and political freedom in its first two decades of existence, but internal and external factors would quickly work to undermine the sovereignty it enjoyed. From its very inception, the legitimacy of the nation was questioned both by a large number of its citizens and by nationals of neighboring countries. Indeed, “if the history of mankind attests to the less-humane wisdom that ‘freedom is born in blood’ then the ‘negotiated’ revolution in Prague in 1918

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<sup>3</sup> “Mr. Lloyd George and Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, November 7, 1938, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 87.

may have had the foreboding aspect of ‘easy come, easy go.’”<sup>5</sup> Twenty years after Czechoslovakia gained its independence out of Austro-Hungarian dismemberment without a shot being fired, the perceived illegitimacy of the nation would be used to fracture its territorial and political sovereignty, and Nazi Germany would occupy the nation without firing a shot.<sup>6</sup>

The man at the helm of Czechoslovakia upon its dismemberment in the Munich Agreement of September 1938 was President Edvard Beneš. Beneš had joined Tomáš Masaryk in exile abroad in the spring of 1915 and became an invaluable leader in the campaign for Czechoslovak independence. Masaryk after the war affirmed the importance of Beneš in the struggle for self-determination, claiming that “without Beneš, we would have had no Republic.”<sup>7</sup> From 1918 to 1935 Beneš acted as Czechoslovakia’s foreign minister and upon the abdication of Masaryk due to failing health in December of 1935 became president of the young state. But Beneš rose to the presidency at a tumultuous time in the nation and in Europe. His appointment as President of the Republic by Parliament came after much behind the scenes political negotiating and Beneš did not garner the kind of respect and unified support enjoyed by Masaryk. In addition, foreign relations with many neighboring countries had become icy and hostile, as by the time Beneš was sworn into the presidency in the beginning of 1936 Czechoslovakia had become the last outpost for liberal democracy in a Central Europe dominated by authoritarian regimes. Sections of Czechoslovakia’s large German

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<sup>5</sup> Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Czechoslovak Legions comprised of nationalist Czech and Slovak exiles and prisoners of war did fight against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Central Powers during World War I in Russia and France, but, in terms of internal revolution, violence against Habsburg rule inside the territories of what would become Czechoslovakia was mostly nonexistent. See Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 170.

<sup>7</sup> Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 28.

minority had become radicalized by the success of Nazi fascism in neighboring Germany and Austria and by the spring of 1938 Adolf Hitler was calling for the annexation of the predominantly German inhabited areas of Czechoslovakia into the Reich. The resulting diplomatic crisis came to a (temporary) close with the signing of the much studied Munich Agreement between Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy on September 29, 1938 and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity over the following week. President Beneš resigned on October 5, and for the second time in less than twenty-five years would leave his home nation for exile in a foreign land. Upon his resignation, Edvard Beneš would speak to the Czechoslovak people one final time and assure them of his undying commitment to fight for the thriving autonomy of his young nation:

I believe that my present sacrifice is a political necessity. But it does not mean I shall forget my duty as a citizen to continue to work for our ideals. I wish for you all, for all the people, better days and that our nation may again prosper as one of the noblest and finest nations in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

This study examines the World War II experience of Edvard Beneš and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile he established after Germany occupied the entirety of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939.<sup>9</sup> The actions of the Czechoslovak exiled politicians are analyzed in the framework of legitimacy in mid-twentieth century international politics. The goal of this study is to explore how Beneš's exiled government achieved a sufficient level of recognition and authority to act as the legitimate representative body of the current and future Czechoslovakia, and then to contrast this symbolic recognition

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<sup>8</sup> Edvard Beneš, *Edvard Beneš in His Own Words* (New York: Czech-American National Alliance, 1944), 36.

<sup>9</sup> From October 1938 to March 1939 the Czechoslovak government still remained in power, controlling the majority of the 1918 Czechoslovak territories except for those borderlands annexed by Germany (and Poland and Hungary) after the Munich Agreement. In March of 1939, though, Hitler would invade the remainder of the autonomous state and the Czechoslovak government would be effectively dissolved. For continued discussion of the Munich Agreement, see Chapter 1, pp. 11-15.

with the precise level of legitimacy and control the London exiles in actuality enjoyed. This study will, in turn, allow for broader discussion of the treatment in international relations of the unique twentieth century entities of governments-in-exile from occupied and fractured states. The path to renewed authority was problematic for Beneš's exile government, as foreign nations in the first half of the war were reluctant to bestow recognition and internal strife continually threatened to divided Czechs and Slovaks at home and abroad. In this vein, after examining the actions of Czechoslovak politicians between 1938 and 1945, this study concludes with an assessment of the final successes of the exiles: how smoothly was the transition from exile organization to home government and what was the ultimate fate of the government-in-exile after the war? Beneš's exiles accomplished a significant amount politically during the war, experiencing great initial triumph in the reacquisition of political and territorial independence for the Czechoslovak nation. Ultimately, however, the government's existence would be short-lived. On February 25, 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gained control of the government and brought an end to the nation's revived democratic traditions. In the framework of Max Weber, stability of governance relies on an adequate level of legitimate authority mixed with coercive control. It is with this understanding of some possible degree of ultimate illegitimacy in Beneš's government during and after the war that the struggle for recognition and power is examined.<sup>10</sup>

This work is rooted in a variety of strong previous studies of Czechoslovak politics during World War II, though surprisingly only a few comprehensive post-Cold War examinations of the exile movement have been published. The Czechoslovak

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Bensman, "Max Weber's Concept of Legitimacy: An Evaluation," in *Conflict and Control: Challenge to Legitimacy of Modern Governments*, ed. Arthur J. Vidich and Ronald M. Glassman (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975), 41.



government-in-exile has been described in detail in a handful of biographical works on prominent exile politicians such as Edvard Beneš and Jan Masaryk (the son of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk).<sup>11</sup> A few comprehensive histories of Czechoslovak exile activity have been written, predominantly by authors who were directly involved in exiled politics during the war.<sup>12</sup> In general, previous historical works have used the successes and failures of the government-in-exile in London either to explain the actions of the Allied Forces during World War II, or examine through a Cold War perspective the spread of communism in Eastern Europe after the war.<sup>13</sup> This work uses the story of Beneš's wartime government to explore the struggle for legitimacy by contending exiled political organizations. Instead of looking at what the Czechoslovaks accomplished during the war, this study focuses on how the exiles accomplished their goals and to what extent these "accomplishments" were true successes at all. This study does not aim to praise President Beneš and his democratic allies for their valiant struggle against two kinds of totalitarianism, fascism and communism, as do many works.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it the goal of this work to condemn Beneš for his failures and at times selfish, shortsighted political maneuvers, as have some historians.<sup>15</sup> Instead, this study looks at the Czechoslovaks

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<sup>11</sup> Such as Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Zbyněk Zeman, *The Masaryks* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); Edward Táborský, *President Edvard Beneš: Between East and West* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Jan Křen, *Do emigrace* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1963); Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*; several chapters in Mamatey and Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*.

<sup>13</sup> In particular Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> Post-1989 Czechs and Slovaks have generally looked back with reverence and nostalgia to the pre-communist years of the Czechoslovak state, and in doing so tend to overly praise their past democratic leaders and their ultimately unsuccessful struggles. Western historians, particularly in the decade following World War II, also tended to view the Czechoslovak democrats with great reverence. See Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 2.

<sup>15</sup> In particular Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*. Czechoslovak communist history from 1948-1989 also took a critical stance toward the bourgeois Beneš and his London exiles, though it mostly saw them as hopelessly misguided, not necessarily utterly evil.

through an understanding of the impossible situation in which exiles are placed, of how political needs of the exile organization are at times at odds with the needs of the nation it claims to represent, and of how this divide can lead to a difficult and muddled transfer of power if and when the possibility of homecoming becomes a reality.

As an examination of the status of an exile political organization, this study is supported not only by documents pertaining to Czechoslovak wartime actions and relations with the Allied Powers, but also is framed by previous theoretical research on legitimacy and structures of mid-twentieth century exile recognition and authority. Limited but highly useful works have dealt with these issues, and this examination of 1940s Czechoslovakia draws from Weberian ideas of legitimacy and their contemporary reinterpretations as well as from international political theory on the behavior of émigré politics.<sup>16</sup> Max Weber stressed the necessity for a stable government to maintain a healthy level of “pure legitimacy” by upholding citizens’ confidence in the state through logical appeals to the traditional, charismatic, or legal authority of the institute of governance. Expanding from a simplistic “justification, validity, consent” political model, Weber and his followers also saw political control as a monopoly of the state’s means of violence, thus concluding that “the balance between naked coercion, legitimate violence, and pure legitimacy is thus decisive for the concept of legitimacy.”<sup>17</sup> For an exile government divorced from control over its state’s coercive apparatus, ideas of “pure legitimacy” become important, and while the “empirically slippery” concept of

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<sup>16</sup> In particular Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989). Also Arthur J. Vidich and Ronald M. Glassman, eds., *Conflict and Control: Challenge to Legitimacy of Modern Governments* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Bensman, “Max Weber’s Concept of Legitimacy,” 41.

legitimacy is in no way the whole story, this theoretical framing does help to better approach an examination of the means and methods of an exile organization.<sup>18</sup>

This study approaches the Czechoslovak government-in-exile's search for legitimation from three different directions: the recognition of the government from above by the Allied Powers, international organizations, and other nations; the support of the government from below by citizens of Czechoslovakia at home and abroad; and the acceptance of the exile government's authority horizontally by contending Czechoslovak leaders in Paris, London, and Moscow. The study begins with a description of the exiled Czechoslovak politicians in Western Europe between 1938 and 1941 and the actions they took and arguments they made for the recognition of their legitimate authority. It then examines the beliefs and aims of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union as they recognized Beneš's government at various stages during the war. Next, the study questions the degree of legitimate authority the government-in-exile truly enjoyed, what actions exiles could and did take during the war, and how much support they garnered from nationals at home in Czechoslovakia. The study ends with a look into the transfer of power from the homeless, exile government back to an organized institution of control over a sovereign nation in 1945. It briefly addresses what happened to the systems of authority from 1945 to 1948, and how specific decisions on whom and what to legitimize during the war affected the collapse of the democratic government and aided the Communist Party's rise to power. Did Beneš's wartime government gain genuine legitimacy, or merely the façade of authenticity? Inhabiting a "peculiar self-legitimizing

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<sup>18</sup> Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 166.

position” divorced from its nation’s apparatus of control, can an exiled government ever truly gain the authority and unity needed to bring stability to its fractured nation?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 32.

## *Chapter One*

### Into Exile: Between London and Paris

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World War II was a peak period in world history for the propagation of governments-in-exile. There have existed from time to time exiled leaders claiming power over territories they no longer physically occupied, but the brand of exile organization claiming legitimate authority through international appeals to legal-bureaucratic precedent and Wilsonian self-determination was unique to the 1940s. Add these unique characteristics to the sheer unprecedented number of exile governments vying for recognition during World War II, and it becomes clear that the period is essential for studying the processes of legitimation for political exiles. The uniqueness of the period is further exemplified by the fact that most governments-in-exile since 1945 have not received the high degree of recognition bestowed on the exiles of World War II, and are referred to more frequently as exile organizations or groups, not governments. Fascist militaristic expansion generated more recognized claims for legitimate authority divorced from control over a territory's means of coercive violence than at any other point in history.¹

The story of Czechoslovak exile activity during World War II, however, was not originally a story of an exiled political institution. The exiled government that would eventually form around former President Edvard Beneš did not begin to coalesce until the

¹ Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 114.

summer of 1940. After the Munich Agreement of September 1938, Czechoslovaks abroad were expatriates, tourists and refugees, not political exiles, or more specifically not exiles who participated in “political activity directed against the policies of a home regime... so as to create circumstances favorable to their return.”² The result of the Munich Agreement, signed on September 29, was a dramatic loss of territory for Czechoslovakia, but the Czechoslovak government continued to operate in Prague under the authority of Prime Minister Jan Syrový. Syrový had formed his administration with the consent of President Beneš on September 22 after the resignation of former Premier Milan Hodža amidst the turmoil of the “Sudetenland” crises but one week before the meeting between Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier at Munich that finalized Czechoslovakia’s territorial rearrangement.³ The Munich Agreement did not lead to the dissolution of the Czechoslovak government or a breakdown of independent Czechoslovak political authority, as there was clear continuity between the administration before and after the crisis, albeit a reduction in the government’s foreign and domestic reputation due to the German diplomatic victory.

The events of September 1938 did lead to the exit of President Edvard Beneš from political life, though. The Munich Agreement was a devastatingly personal defeat for Beneš. As the foreign minister under President Masaryk for twenty years, Beneš had in 1925 forged a mutual defense pact for his nation with France. This alliance would prove hollow, though, as French Premier Édouard Daladier, not wanting to be forced into war

² Martin A. Miller, *The Russian Revolution Émigrés, 1825-1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 6-8. See also Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 15.

³ The term “Sudetenland” was first promoted by German separatists in the border regions of Bohemia after World War I. It has its origins in the Sudeten Mountains of the region, but the term has shallow historical roots and has not been in common usage by either Germans or Czechs since the close of World War II. It refers not to an easily definable geographical region, but to the scattered areas of western Czechoslovakia that held German-speaking majorities and that were subsequently annexed by Germany during the first week of October 1938.

with Germany over Czechoslovakia's "Sudetenland" and guided by British Prime Minister Chamberlain, maneuvered around Beneš's treaty and acquiesced at Munich to the territorial disintegration of France's closest continental ally. No Czechoslovak politicians were consulted during these September 29 negotiations and the results were handed down as an ultimatum to President Beneš: hand over Czechoslovakia's borderlands or stand on your own militarily. While the President of the Republic was not stipulated by the Constitution to head foreign negotiations, Beneš acted as the main Czechoslovak player during the crisis and, though in perpetual discussion with other Czechoslovak politicians, acted ultimately of his own accord. On September 30, after a month of tense, tiring negotiation and political upheaval, Beneš saw no choice but to accept this finalized Munich Agreement. Feeling utterly abandoned by his foreign allies and hoping to avoid a futile, bloody defensive war against the German Reich, Beneš ordered the demobilization of the Czechoslovak military and the dissolution of Czechoslovak boundaries without bringing the issue to Parliament. On October 5 amidst clear hostility and disapproval from Czechoslovak politicians and civilians alike for his failed foreign policy, Beneš resigned from the presidency.⁴

The exact details of Beneš's resignation would prove divisive for the future organization of Czechoslovak leadership abroad. Did Beneš resign his presidency voluntarily or under duress from German and Czechoslovak actors? Unlike other leaders of exiled governments during World War II, Beneš did not directly lose his position of

⁴ Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 134: "The mood was clearly hostile to Beneš, who was held responsible for the disastrous turn of events." Throughout the September crisis there was talk among certain Czechoslovak political and military factions of removing President Beneš and reversing his capitulation agreement. Czech and Slovak citizens also reacted strongly against Beneš's decision to acquiesce to the Germans. On the night of September 30, for example, a large angry crowd surrounded the President's residence at the Prague Castle.

power from an act of Nazi aggression, and thus the justification for his return to power through appeals to the continuation of rightful authority would always be contentious. In his farewell address to the nation on October 5, 1938, Beneš asserted that he had made his decision “after consultation with political leaders and constitutional authorities and of my own personal free will.”⁵ Some observers thought that Hitler had a hand in the ousting of his hated political enemy, but little proof was found for this conclusion initially:

For a moment there was some excitement at the rumor that the resignation resulted from a direct demand by the Reichsfuehrer Hitler of Germany. It soon appeared, however, from the text of Beneš resignation and from an immediately preceding declaration of government policy made by Syrový that Hitler’s only hand in this business was an indirect one of having produced the present situation in Czechoslovakia.⁶

Several years later Beneš and Dr. Vojtěch Mastný, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin at the time, would claim that Hitler and his Nazi government had tactfully pressured Beneš into resignation. Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France were still finalizing the details of the last stage of Czechoslovak territorial partitioning, and Mastný later claimed that Hitler had threatened to increase German demands for every day President Beneš remained in office.⁷ Although the level of Hitler’s direct involvement in Beneš’s resignation remains unclear, Beneš undoubtedly felt his presence at the helm of the Republic was a harmful obstruction. As one American newspaper editorial interpreted: “Beneš was singled out for some particularly violent Nazi invective while he was trying

⁵ Edvard Beneš, *Edvard Beneš in His Own Words* (New York: Czech-American National Alliance, 1944), 35.

⁶ “Benes Resigns; Czech State to Have New Policy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1938, p. 3.

⁷ Edvard Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš: from Munich to New War and New Victory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 50; Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 138. Germany occupied Czechoslovak regions with German majorities gradually between October 1 and October 10. Final agreements settled which regions with similar percentages of Czech and German residents would go to Germany, as well as what areas Poland and Hungary could claim from the dissected Czechoslovak state.

to preserve what he could of his country. When the final blow fell he resigned to ease the situation and to permit the readjustment of Czechoslovakian affairs in line with the new necessities arising from broken treaties and the fact of German domination.”⁸ In an October 5 letter to Prime Minister Syrový, Beneš acknowledged that “he was so closely identified with the past that he feels he will be a hindrance in shaping the new life of the Czechoslovak republic in its altered boundaries.”⁹ With that, Beneš exited the public sphere he had been such an integral part of for three decades and became a private citizen once more.

After Beneš’s departure from the Presidency, the story of Czechoslovakia was no longer a story of Edvard Beneš and would not be so again for some time. As politics continued in the Prague Castle and Czechoslovak authorities handed the administration of the “Sudetenland” over to the Germans, Beneš retired to his isolated estate in the southern Bohemian town of Sezimovo Ústí. His stay would be temporary though, as after a week of continually denying any intention to leave his home nation for exile in the West, Beneš finally accepted a guest professorship position from the University of Chicago on October 18.¹⁰ After an oddly abrupt departure, possibly to avoid any political enemies or Czech and German Nazi sympathizers from preventing him from leaving the country, Beneš flew to London on October 22, so surprising the Czech legation that “officials got to Croydon airport too late to greet him.”¹¹

⁸ “Benes Seeks a Free Country,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 25, 1938, p. 10.

⁹ “Benes Resigns; Czech State to Have New Policy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1938, p. 3.

¹⁰ A notably high number of expatriate Czechs and Slovaks resided in the Chicago area. The first Czechoslovak president and former mentor of Beneš, Tomáš G. Masaryk, also lectured at the University of Chicago between 1903 and 1908.

¹¹ “Benes Escapes to London on Secret Flight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 23, 1938, p. 3. An editorial in the *Tribune* two days later agreed with Beneš’s decision to leave Czechoslovakia, asserting: “It can’t be said that he escaped, but it was at least prudent for him to go before he was restrained. The Nazi treatment of Schuschnigg, the former Austrian chancellor, who has been confined ever since the annexation

Beneš would remain in the West for the next seven years, an exile from his home nation for the second time in twenty-five years. Upon his previous venture into exile during World War I, Beneš had been received with far more warmth and enthusiasm by his Western European hosts. This time, though, Beneš took refuge in the very countries that had abandoned him at Munich, countries whom Beneš ever since the day of his acceptance of the Munich Agreement had denounced as no longer trustworthy: “The state of western democracies is desolate. They are unreliable.”¹² Beneš remained in England only briefly, resting in solitude before traveling to the United States to become a professor once more, as he had been before World War I.¹³ Although his presence in England and America made some in those countries worry that the maligned, “shortsighted politician” who had clumsily steered “that joke of a patchwork nation” towards its dismemberment might have ulterior political motives, Beneš worked hard to demonstrate that he was in Chicago “as a professor and not a politician.”¹⁴ So for the time being former President Edvard Beneš stood divorced from his previous position, a controversial figure removed from his powerbase and possessing few friends: “When he stepped from the presidency Dr. Beneš told the nation his personality might become a hindrance to its reconstruction. He apparently is standing firm in his decision to become

and who is to be tried for treason, was a warning, and doubtless intended as such, to men who have stood in Hitler’s way.” See “Benes Seeks a Free Country,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 25, 1938, p. 10.

¹² Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 137. See also Míla Lvová, *Minchov a Edvard Beneš* (Prague: Svoboda, 1968), 180. Remarks were addressed to members of the Permanent Council for the Defense of the Republic on September 30, 1938.

¹³ Beneš was a hugely popular professor at the University of Chicago, with his lectures well attended and students voting him the outstanding professor of the year after the spring 1939 semester: “His matter-of-fact, unemotional style of public speaking became a great asset to him at the time.” See Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 146.

¹⁴ A large number of newspaper articles in the Western print media at the time, particularly letters to the editor, deeply criticized Beneš for his ill-fated foreign policy and his apparent mistreatment of Czechoslovakia’s German minority. While German actions were not praised in the West either, Beneš became one of the more maligned figures in the Munich controversy. See *The Times*, October 5, 1938, p. 12 and November 7, 1938, p. 8; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 31, p. 8 and November 6, 1938, p. 14; Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 141.

a private citizen again.”¹⁵ Criticized by some for being initially too harsh against Czechoslovakia’s German minority and by others for being too weak in the face of Hitler’s aggression, Beneš’s reputation with Czechoslovaks and foreigners alike at the end of 1938 had never been so poor.¹⁶

Meanwhile events in Czechoslovakia progressed without the former president. Governmental policies in Prague by and large realigned themselves to reduce hostility towards German interests, as after the loss of its outer defensive shell and its abandonment by England and France, Czechoslovakia stood more vulnerable to German antagonism than ever before. Czechoslovakia still operated as an independent nation, though, with recognized, legitimate authority over its internal and external policies. After lacking a head of state for a couple months, the Sirovy government soon elected a new president to take the place of Beneš. Emil Hacha, an aging, apolitical, but respected public figure, entered the presidency at the end of November. He became the head of a reorganized “Second Republic of Czechoslovakia” that was significantly weaker than before and that initiated modestly more conservative or fascist policies in its governance.¹⁷ The majority of Czechoslovak politicians realized that “the Republic must be thoroughly reorganized,” though not all agreed on the direction this organization must take.¹⁸ The new conservative government in Prague concluded that this direction must be toward friendly relations with the expanded German Reich that now circled Czechoslovakia on three sides, while diplomats in the West, like the well-respected

¹⁵ “Shorn of Duties, Dr. Benes Finds Peace at Estate,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 10, 1938, p. 5.

¹⁶ For more on Beneš’s post-Munich reputation amongst citizens inside Czechoslovakia, see Chapter 3, pages 68-73.

¹⁷ The Czechoslovak Communist Party was dissolved, and all other parties combined into either the amorphous Party of National Unity, or the smaller National Labor Party. Civil liberties were reduced and foreign policy was closer aligned with Germany. See Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 153-4.

¹⁸ “Government by Decree,” *The Times*, November 19, 1938, p. 11.

Ambassador in Paris, Štefan Osuský, believed that only “Great Britain and France could promote effectively this work of reconstruction.”¹⁹ Edvard Beneš, a hemisphere away in Chicago and still bitter from his treatment by Chamberlain and Daladier at Munich, looked to a future in Czechoslovakia of renewed western partnerships in conjunction with necessarily closer ties to the Slav sister in the East, the Soviet Union. At the close of 1938, Czechoslovakia was a disordered, isolated nation, with even its closest friends and allies questioning the infant state’s territorial integrity and right to existence.

An argument could be made that Adolf Hitler was the greatest friend of Edvard Beneš from 1939-1945 and did more towards repairing Beneš’s damaged reputation and restoring him to a position of power than did even the Czechoslovaks or the Allied Powers. With every aggressive militaristic action Hitler took, Beneš’s international standing progressively improved. The invasions of Poland in 1939, France in 1940, and the Soviet Union in 1941 did more to consolidate and concentrate Beneš’s power and prestige than any action that Beneš himself undertook. Beneš’s road to political resurrection began on the Ides of March, 1939 with the forceful German occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Hitler had convinced Slovak leader and Catholic Priest, Father Jozef Tiso, to secede (with German support) from Czechoslovakia and establish an independent, fascist Slovak state. Hitler then used this action as justification to invade the remainder of the Czech lands and establish the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.” The previous Czechoslovak government remained in office and

¹⁹ “Government by Decree,” *The Times*, November 19, 1938, p. 11.

became puppets of a German Protectorate administration.²⁰ On March 16, 1939, President Hácha eulogized the fallen Czechoslovak nationhood experiment that was destroyed after a mere two decades of existence: “What we hailed for a solution to last for ages proved to be merely a short episode in our national history... By our union with [Germany] the former unity of the Reich had been restored.”²¹ With that, the legally elected and recognized President of Czechoslovakia admitted the fragility of his nation and questioned its very right to existence. Indeed, during the whole of World War II “no other victim of Hitler’s aggression – with the possible exception of Austria – had poorer prospects for regaining freedom than did Czechoslovakia in 1939.”²²

At the true beginning of Czechoslovak political exile activity in March, 1939, former President Beneš was not the only Czech or Slovak politician abroad, nor was he anywhere near the most influential. Hans Speier commented that when diplomats and military officers, whose role is utterly dependent on their nation, are suddenly exiled from their home state, they “often find themselves nationally useless and end up writing their memoirs or as taxi-drivers.”²³ For the exiled Czechoslovak cause this was not the case though. A military officer, General Lev Prchala, and several foreign diplomats, Štefan Osuský in France chief among them, immediately rose to prominence in the international eye and became exiled spokesmen for an enslaved nation. General Prchala commanded a small Czechoslovak army that had escaped to Poland from the Carpathian

²⁰ President Hácha would remain in office for the entirety of the war. A new cabinet was formed around a new prime minister in March 1939, however. General Alois Eliáš, former minister of transport in the previous cabinet, was chosen as prime minister partly due to the relatively amiable relationship he had with the new German overseer of the Czech lands, Reichsprotektor Baron von Neurath. See Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 304.

²¹ Vojtěch Mastný, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 142.

²³ Hans Speier, *Social Order and the Rise of War: Papers in Political Sociology* (New York: G. W. Stewart, 1952), 92. See also Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*: 114.

Ruthenia region of eastern Czechoslovakia, driven out by the Hungarian army that entered the region on March 15, 1939 in conjunction with Germany's occupation of the western Czech lands. Osuský and a handful of other foreign diplomats who resisted Hitler's invasion by refusing to relinquish their embassies to German authorities after March 15 were the Czechoslovaks who maintained the greatest legal recognition internationally. Beneš encouraged these last remnants of Czechoslovak national integrity to "hold on to legal continuity no matter what happens," and the legations in Paris, London, Washington, and Moscow resisted German pressure to become the first hubs for exile diplomatic activity.²⁴ Envoy Osuský, who had been the trusted ambassador for two decades to France, Czechoslovakia's closest ally, in particular enjoyed a prominent position, as Beneš relates in his memoirs:

Still recognized by the Government to which he had been accredited, [Osuský] held himself to be and was in reality the last vestige of the authority of the Republic which *de facto* had been suppressed at home. This automatically gave him a very advantageous position compared with all other Czechoslovak citizens abroad whose legal position from the international standpoint was very uncertain.²⁵

Yossi Shain in his study of political émigrés states that for exiled politicians vying for renewed influence, "organization is the key to political power" and the first task in exile "is to regroup scattered ranks and establish communication with those at home."²⁶ Czechs and Slovaks strewn abroad in March 1939 found half their home nation occupied by a foreign force and the other half spilt off into an independent fascist satellite state. "Czechoslovakia" no longer existed, and in this confused condition former Czechoslovak politicians attempted to rebuild once more a nation from scratch.

²⁴ Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 94.

²⁵ Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 99n.

²⁶ Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 21-30.

In this atmosphere of national disharmony, Edvard Beneš attempted to enter back into politics once more: partly out of a desire to regain his former prominence, but mostly out of concern for the future of his subjugated nation. By Beneš's account, no one was more qualified to "raise his voice in protest and act freely in the name of the Nation except the second President of the Republic." Beneš justified to Czechoslovaks, to foreign leaders, and to himself his decision to return to political life by arguing against the permanence of his October 1938 resignation: "By Hitler's crime, by this fresh British and French failure to keep their pledged word and by Hácha's signature to the protectorate I felt freed from all earlier obligations which I had temporarily imposed myself and from all that I had been forced to take part in by violence and pressure since September 19th, 1938."²⁷ He immediately sent telegrams to Roosevelt, Chamberlain, Daladier and Litvinov after the German occupation and began organizing Czech and Slovak associations in the United States. But Beneš was a secluded individual, residing in a country that would remain in an isolationist shell for two and a half more years, and possessing strained relations with the leaders of France and Great Britain. Even the German overseers of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia worried little about Beneš's actions abroad. Karl Hermann Frank, Assistant to the Reichsprotektor, in a speech on Czech dissidents at a June 1939 meeting of the Nazi Party in southern Bohemia, stated that the Germans knew well who their Czech enemies were and "when we clamp down, neither Mr. Prchala nor Mr. Osuský will save them"²⁸ He failed to mention once the actions of Beneš.

²⁷ Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 64.

²⁸ George Kennan, *From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 180. The German administrator of the Czech lands was titled the "Reichsprotektor" and oversaw the activities of the subordinated Czech government.

Beneš seemed to acknowledge his reduced status at first, and worked cooperatively towards the goal of a renewed Czechoslovakia with Czech and Slovak diplomats and private citizens in America, England, France, Russia, and Poland. He recognized the prominent role in exile leadership enjoyed by Envoy Osuský, who after France's declaration of war on Germany in September had been charged by the French government with the establishment of a Czechoslovak army comprised of Czech and Slovak exile soldiers. In retrospect, though, Beneš claimed that he had always viewed Osuský as a temporary leader of the liberation movement. In his memoirs, Beneš states that "as far as the State was concerned [Osuský] could serve as an important *starting point* for the new fight and as a basis for new political successes when the full political fight for liberation began afresh." He continues by asserting that Osuský and his allied diplomats "drew impossible deductions, [and] regarded all other political personalities as 'private' persons and themselves to be the only political representatives of the State and Nation. They claimed that this entitled them to some special position of leadership in the resistance movement."²⁹ Beneš still felt he was the best man to lead the disorganized but slowly coalescing liberation movement, and pressed forward in his activities accordingly.

One month after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Beneš met with twenty delegates of American Czech and Slovak associations in Chicago. This limited group of mostly long-time American residents, far from representative of the Czechoslovak nation as a whole and without any legitimate authority, invited Beneš to bring "all free Czechs and Slovaks in Europe, America and elsewhere under one leadership and a common political programme" and to "take over the *Leadership of the United Liberation*

²⁹ Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 99n [italics original].

*Movement of Czechoslovakia all over the World.*³⁰ The name of this theoretical and in reality nonexistent movement is highly problematic and an inaccurate description of whatever position Beneš now held. Beneš had received no leadership mandate from a representative body of exiled Czechs and Slovaks. Furthermore, the political exile movement at that time was far from being “united,” with Czechs and Slovaks around the world holding wildly different opinions and following diverse leaders. The term “liberation” is also problematic, as the pre-invasion government in Prague under President Hácha still existed and was not pleading to be liberated. In addition, the “Czechoslovakia” as Beneš envisaged it no longer existed in many international eyes. After October 1938 the country’s name had been changed to Czecho-Slovakia, and after March 1939 there supposedly existed two separate nations: The Slovak Republic and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (not to mention Carpathian Ruthenia which was being held by Hungary). Axis-aligned nations and some neutral nations like The Vatican, Spain and Switzerland fully recognized the Slovak Republic, while other countries, including Great Britain and later the Soviet Union, recognized the *de facto* independence of Slovakia and exchanged diplomatic consuls. Beneš was appointed the leader of a nonexistent movement by a small number of American Czechs, and for every Czech or Slovak who supported Beneš there were many exiles in America alone who had decidedly mixed feelings about the former president. Regardless, Beneš used this

³⁰ *New-Yorkské Listy*, April 21, 1939, p. 1 [emphasis added]. See also Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 298.

language of legitimacy and a flimsy invitation to leadership to build his position internationally and gain more influence with Czechoslovaks abroad.³¹

By the beginning of summer, Beneš decided that he would be of more use in Europe than in the United States. After a meeting with Franklin D. Roosevelt on May 28 in which Beneš appeared to receive indications of unofficial support and solidarity from the American President, Beneš set off for London at the beginning of July, 1939.³² Claiming that he was only traveling to London “to fulfill a series of lecture engagements,” Beneš accepted a permanent professorship at the University of Chicago to begin in the fall of 1940.³³ Did Beneš believe that he would only remain in Europe temporarily and soon return to his private life in Chicago? Did he not truly see himself becoming the unifying leader of the “United Liberation Movement of Czechoslovakia all over the World?” Whatever his predications, Beneš would not return to Chicago and would remain in London as war broke out in Europe and exiled Czechoslovaks began migrating back towards their former president.

But Beneš’s leadership role was not settled on yet. Osuský and Prchala still held more sway than he, and the struggle for the leadership of the Czechoslovak exiles, and for recognition by the larger powers, would only intensify with Beneš’s arrival in Europe. The exiled Czechoslovak community between 1939 and 1940 or 1941 perfectly fits Yossi Shain’s description of exile strife: “The political world of the exile is anything but united. It frequently resembles a lion’s den. Indeed, the intensity of the inter- and intraexile conflicts often diverts energy from the attainment of the ultimate group goal, a return to

³¹ For discussion of the lack of any untied liberation movement prior to November 1939 and the mixed opinion towards Beneš in America, see “Correspondence with Lawyers,” Folder 6, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA; Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 146.

³² Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 149; Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 75-80.

³³ “Benes Accepts Permanent Job at U. of Chicago,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1939, p. 7.

the homeland.”³⁴ Beneš’s return to Europe and his interactions with exiles in England and France only worked to exacerbate this strife, as observed by the Czech diplomat and soon to be Assistant to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Beneš’s government, Ivo D. Duchacek: “When in the first week of October, President Beneš came to Paris from London, his unofficial presence, officially ignored by the French government, was more of a hindrance than of help to our efforts.” Duchacek continued by explaining that Minister Osuský’s “opposition to President Beneš was one of the major controversies splitting the Czechoslovak exiles.”³⁵

In a European world still partly entrenched in an imperialistic worldview, in a time of large nations butting heads with one another and big power politics, for representatives of a small nation like Czechoslovakia to gain recognition and have their voices heard is no small task. Although Beneš returned to politics disadvantaged and subservient to the already entrenched Czechoslovak leaders Prchala and Osuský, he maintained the distinct advantage of being a highly recognizable figure: a former head of state separate from the sea of lesser Czechoslovak politicians. In the imperfect world of foreign relations and diplomatic recognition, the most visible politician often times becomes the officially recognized leader. Beneš was “a statesman of international stature and none of his compatriots could even remotely compare with him in political skill and experience.”³⁶ Although Beneš was a highly controversial figure, to whom several foreign governments refused even to speak in 1939, his political drive and aptitude,

³⁴ Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 38.

³⁵ “In the Funnel of Two Tornados: The Nazi and Soviet Captures of the Heart of Europe: Political Diaries,” p. 137, Folder 3, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA. This box in the collection contains Duchacek’s World War II diaries and his unfinished, unpublished memoirs.

³⁶ Mastný, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 140.

combined with a series of fortunate events, propelled him upward towards his previous position of power. As the president of a democratic republic, Beneš eventually regained power not through democratic means, but through the only means available to the political exile: behind the scenes maneuvering, maintaining friends in high places, arguments coated in semi-legal logic, and, above all, hope and perseverance.

Beneš came to Europe in the summer of 1939 hoping to set up a government-in-exile, but neither Prchala nor Osuský, nor the governments of England and France wanted anything to do with a prospective Beneš-centered government. In a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt on September 1, 1939, the American Ambassador to France, William Bullitt, described this general hostility towards Beneš and urged Roosevelt to follow the same policy as France and Great Britain in avoiding the former president. Bullitt stressed in his letter that “both the French and British took the position that they had refused to admit that Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist as an independent state, and were still recognizing the competence of the Ministers of Czechoslovakia in both Paris and London.” He went on to agree with the French and English prognosis that there “was no basis for a Beneš provisional government, except Beneš’s desire to place himself at the head of something again,” and stressed that “nearly everyone in political life in both France and England considers that Beneš is an utterly selfish small person.” Bullitt’s final advice for FDR was to recognize the authority of Osuský, the rightful representative of Czechoslovak interests:

You will get into endless embarrassment, if you try to recognize a provisional government which has no existence and no authority anywhere. We can and should keep up the fiction that the Czech Minister in Washington represents the Czechoslovak State. If he asks for advice, he should be told that he should cooperate fully with the Czech Minister in

France who is organizing the Czech Army and is recognized by the French Government as the sole representative of the Czechoslovak State.³⁷

Beneš may have been driven by some of the selfish motivations his opponents described, but as one of the three founding fathers of the Czechoslovak nation he undoubtedly held great love for his country and desired to see it restored once more. In October 1939, Beneš came to France in an attempt to repair broken relationships and advocate a more unified liberation movement. He knew that organization was the key to political power for homeless émigrés, and that unity, or at least the appearance of unity, was paramount for an exile organization's legitimate existence.³⁸ It was in this vein that he pushed so hard for the establishment of a provisional government. Unfortunately for Beneš, though, the French and their ally Minister Osuský did not see the need for a Czechoslovak exile government, and the French Premier Daladier refused even to speak with Beneš during his visit. Beneš explained these actions as a post-Munich personal hostility: "They had thrown Czechoslovakia and *me personally* to the wolves- and this too did not make them like me *personally*. In their opinion, therefore, it was impossible to link the France they represented with my person."³⁹

To counteract this French hostility, Beneš simply turned away from Paris to court less antagonistic allies for his future provisional government. Chief among these was Winston Churchill. Churchill had always been an ardent critic of the Munich Agreement and of Prime Minister Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and was also an old friend

³⁷ Letter, William Bullitt to Franklin D. Roosevelt, September 1, 1939, President's Secretary's Files (PSF) Safe Files: Czechoslovakia Index, Franklin D. Roosevelt Digital Archives, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Roosevelt would give private signs of support for Beneš in 1939, but indeed the United States would not recognize any provisional Czechoslovak government centered around Beneš for some time. For more, see Chapter 2.

³⁸ Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 45.

³⁹ Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 91 [italics original].

of Edvard Beneš.⁴⁰ In September 1939, after Great Britain declared war on Germany, Churchill was appointed to the War Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. Beneš used this opportunity to maintain his friendly relations with Churchill by writing a congratulatory letter, in which he also thanked Churchill for “the great services you have rendered to my unfortunate country during the last year.” Speaking of the need to protect “justice towards small attacked peoples,” Beneš continued in his letter by stressing his hope “that even in this great struggle my people and myself personally... shall have the occasion to collaborate with you effectively for the victory of these principles, as was the case in the last war twenty-five years ago.”⁴¹ Through building friendships with prominent politicians in England, inserting himself into the political mix, and using the émigré skills he developed during World War I, Beneš gradually healed his reputation in Great Britain and established a powerbase for future activity.

He also repaired relations with former Czechoslovak political colleagues, convincing his close friends Hubert Ripka, Jaromír Smutný, Edward Táborský and Jan Masaryk to join him in London.⁴² The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, severely disordered after being forced to move underground after being banned in the fall of 1938, also expressed sympathy with Beneš’s desire for exile unity.⁴³ More specifically, they supported Beneš in contrast to the more right-leaning Osuský, whom they viciously and repeatedly criticized in the leftist media as “being a reactionary of the worst type [who]

⁴⁰ Churchill would refer to Beneš as his “old friend” on occasion. See: US Department of State Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers: The Conference of Berlin, 1945* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1960), 2-391.

⁴¹ Martin Gilbert, ed., *The Churchill War Papers, Volume 1: At the Admiralty* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 21.

⁴² Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 168. Relationships were so strained during the “Sudetenland” controversy that even Ripka, a long time friend of Beneš, had at one point urged General Prchala to stage a coup d’état to prevent the acceptance of the Munich Agreement. See Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 84.

⁴³ Zeman, *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, 157.

sold out Czechoslovak blood to the reactionary imperialists represented by Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Daladier.”⁴⁴ Due to the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of late August 1939, however, Beneš would only garner inconsistent backing from Czechoslovak communists for the next two years, as the Communist Party was forced to awkwardly support Stalin’s agreement with Hitler and refrain from campaigning against the Nazi occupation of their country. The Communist Party under the leadership of Secretary-General Klement Gottwald had been a moderately strong political party in Czechoslovakia before 1938, receiving ten percent of the National Assembly vote in 1935 to place it fourth among all parties.⁴⁵ With most members exiled in Moscow during the war, the Communist Party would only play an important role in wartime political activity after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Still, their attacks against more conservative exile politicians like Osuský in 1939 and 1940 would measurably help the social democratic Beneš improve his political standing. When they finally did return to the liberation effort in 1941 the Communists would again choose to support Beneš, though during the war they would never officially join the exile government slowly forming around the former President in London.

Although losing the prospect of any constructive personal alliance with the Czechoslovak Communists for the time being in the fall of 1939, Beneš had by this point

⁴⁴ “Communist campaign against Osuský in 1939: Note by Osuský,” Folder 3, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁴⁵ The top seven parties in the 1935 National Assembly Chamber of Representatives election were: Sudeten German Party (15.2%), Agrarian Party (14.3%), Social Democratic Party (12.6%), Communist Party (10.3%), National Socialist Party (9.2%), People’s Party/Christian Democratic Party (7.5 %), and Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (6.9%). The Sudeten German Party, only recently created, and the Slovak People’s Party were both separatist parties in nature. The Communist Party had also been an anti-government, revolutionary party until 1935, the year relations between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia greatly improved with the signing of a treaty of friendship. See Oskar Krejčí, *History of Elections in Bohemia and Moravia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 161-3; Josef Korbel, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 30-1.

effectively neutralized General Prchala's challenge to his authority. Hitler's invasion of Poland in September had destroyed Prchala's base of power in Warsaw, and without an army under his command Prchala garnered little authority or recognition. Prchala was forced to accept the legitimate authority of Beneš by agreeing to join the London group. The General later protested that Beneš used lies and false assertions to grab power, describing a letter he received in which "Dr. Beneš presented himself as chief of the liberation movement elected by all the ambassadors and men of importance abroad and gave me an ultimatum to sign to join this body and to be subordinate to him." Prchala stressed that he only later found out that Beneš's assertion of unquestioned authority was untrue.⁴⁶ This neutralization of Prchala effectively limited Beneš's active Czechoslovak rivals primarily to Osuský and the former Prime Minister, Milan Hodža – both Slovaks incidentally, opposed to the Czech-dominated group forming around Beneš in London.

Although the Western Powers were still wary of Beneš's divisive status and the potentially unbalanced, unrepresentative composition of his London group, Beneš's maneuvering made France and England "ready to make an experiment" with the Czechoslovak National Committee Beneš proposed. But Minister Osuský as organizer of the Czechoslovak army in France and the legally recognized representative of the Czechoslovak Republic still held more authority, especially with the French Government. Accordingly, France would only recognize a National Committee if Osuský was part of it.⁴⁷ In November 1939, Osuský finally agreed to combine forces with Beneš, and a loose National Committee was formed to organize the political activities of Czechs and

⁴⁶ "Beneš in the Box," *Catholic Herald*, December 11, 1943. See also "Bound copy of newspaper clippings," Folder 1, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁴⁷ "Communist campaign against Osuský in 1939: Note by Osuský," Folder 3, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

Slovaks abroad and guarantee a unified management of the exiled army. Committee centers were established in several countries where Czechoslovak diplomatic legations remained, but the two main centers of power were around Osuský in Paris and Beneš in London. Osuský still for the most part commanded the recognition of the Western Powers, but more and more was Beneš gaining influence in England, as Czechoslovak diplomats migrated towards London and political relationships were forged with the British.⁴⁸

The Czechoslovak National Committee was not a certified provisional government and had only limited authority and responsibility. It was recognized by France and Great Britain at the end of 1939 as competent only to “represent the Czechoslovak peoples” and to aid in the “reconstruction of the Czechoslovak army in France.”⁴⁹ In its “First Declaration,” the National Committee proclaimed that it had “undertaken the task to direct your affairs, the Czechoslovak People, until the time this war ends and the administration of your affairs returns to your hands.”⁵⁰ In this description there is a clear divide between the Czechoslovak nation and the disconnected committee of diplomats that had formed to represent provisionally “the Czechoslovak People.” This group of exiles held a tenuous position internationally, but they had succeeded in establishing a primary foothold towards new recognition. The Czech and Slovak émigrés had finally constructed some façade of unity from which to build. The problem remained, though, that this National Committee was far from a united front

⁴⁸ “In the Funnel of Two Tornados: The Nazi and Soviet Captures of the Heart of Europe: Political Diaries,” p. 136, Folder 3, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁴⁹ “Dr. Beneš’s Government in London,” Folder 5, Box 44, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁵⁰ Libuše Otáhalová and Milada Červinková, eds, *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939-1943* (Prague: Academia, 1966), 47.

representative of all Czechoslovak opinions. As Jaromír Smutný, future Chancellor of the Office of President Beneš, described in his March 22, 1940 diary entry: “What our resistance movement abroad is lacking is atmosphere: that of confidence, friendship, coexistence, and collaboration. On the contrary, we live in an atmosphere of constant, general and persistent mistrust, struggle, conflict, controversy, competition for authority, in a war of all against all.”⁵¹ The exile organization coalescing at the beginning of 1940 was not one of united strength, but of forced coexistence, not one of constructive representation, but of conflicting personal opinion. The Czechoslovak National Committee in the first half of 1940 was just as disjointed and fragile as the dismembered Czechoslovak nation.

On May 10, 1940 Hitler attacked France, and a month and a half later France was out of the war. Alongside other French and British troops and officials, Osuský and the Czechoslovak army evacuated to England. During the fight for France the small Czechoslovak forces had suffered 1,600 casualties. With this act of aggression, Nazi Germany effectively secured for Beneš the recognized position of undisputed leader of Czechoslovak exiles in the West.

With the resignation of Prime Minister Édouard Daladier in March and the fall of France in June, Osuský had lost his firmest supporters. He could no longer rely on a nation to support him unequivocally or on powerful leaders to denigrate the actions of Edvard Beneš. Osuský was forced to seek refuge in an England that had grown sympathetic to Beneš’s London group, and to join an organization of Czechoslovak exiles that had accepted the leadership of their former president. In May 1940 on the same day

⁵¹ Ibid., 91. See also Mastný, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 143.

of the German invasion, Neville Chamberlain, the appeaser of Munich, resigned and Beneš's "old friend" Winston Churchill was appointed British Prime Minister.⁵² Suddenly, Beneš's loyal supporter had become the most influential politician in the West at the same time that all those sympathetic to Osuský had lost power. Beneš had once hypothesized such a downfall for his opponent, whom he saw as being too dependent on the support of a single nation and too isolated from other exile groups: "Any envoy who adopted such a policy exposed himself to the possibility – very detrimental to the State – that he would lose all independence vis-à-vis the Government to which he had been accredited."⁵³ As Prchala lost his power with the fall of Poland in 1939, Osuský lost his with the invasion of France in 1940.

Instead of being equally incorporated into the National Committee in England, Czech and Slovak exiles that left Paris for London in the summer of 1940 were ostracized to an extent by the Beneš group. Coming from Paris, Ivo Duchacek observed that "there was also, on the part of London Czechs, a feeling of superiority: in contrast to us, who had foolishly trusted the French armed forces, they had betted on Churchillian England and were proven right."⁵⁴ Attacks on Štefan Osuský intensified in the English press, as fervent hostility toward his actions was no longer strictly limited to the leftist media. An August 15, 1940 article in the *Evening Standard* wrote: "Of Štefan Osuský, former Czech Minister in Paris, it is complained that he allied himself with Right-Wing elements in

⁵² US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers*, 2-391.

⁵³ Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš*, 100n.

⁵⁴ "In the Funnel of Two Tornados: The Nazi and Soviet Captures of the Heart of Europe: Political Diaries," p. 2.28, Folder 3, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

France including Bonnet.”⁵⁵ The *News Review* decried Osuský as an “advocate of cooperation with Hitler.”⁵⁶ These charges were overstated but did work to isolate Osuský from the rest of the exile community. Osuský defended himself by arguing that through refusing to surrender his Paris Legation to Hitler, even after threats to revoke his nationality and confiscate his fortune, he was in fact the first Czechoslovak to take a stand against Nazi aggression.⁵⁷ Much of this criticism of Osuský came from the need to point fingers after the abysmal showing of the Czechoslovak unit in France, an army Osuský oversaw and developed. To a degree, Osuský’s political leanings also played a significant role. Osuský was a conservative Slovak politician, had been friends with more conservative figures in France, and was a firm opponent of the social democratic Beneš, who had been a Marxist in his youth and was still an ardent supporter of socialism.⁵⁸ The London faction around Beneš was composed predominantly of liberal democratic socialists of Czech descent: a clear distinction from the conservative Slovaks Osuský and Hodža, the main dissenters in London at the time.⁵⁹

Beneš’s closest associates sensed the importance of projecting an “image of strength, organizational unity, undisputed leadership, and popular acceptance among their compatriots” if they were to receive increased international recognition for the

⁵⁵ Georges Bonnet, the former French Foreign Minister under Daladier, was a staunch supporter of the Munich Agreement and was firmly opposed to taking military action against Nazi expansion. He was demoted in September of 1939 and later served on the National Council of Vichy France.

⁵⁶ “Communist campaign against Osuský,” Folder 9, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Táborský, Edward, *President Edvard Beneš: Between East and West* (Stanford, CA.: Hoover Institute Press, 1981), 16.

⁵⁹ “Memorial of the Recognition of Dr. Beneš as President of Czechoslovakia and of his Government: Annexe A,” Folder 13, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

Czechoslovak National Committee.⁶⁰ Accordingly, they set about to rid their organization of any paralyzing dissent and joined in the media assault on Osuský and his colleagues. Bohuš Beneš, the brother of Edvard Beneš and the Editor in Chief of the *Čechoslovák*, a popular Czech-language newspaper in Great Britain, used his newspaper to depict the activities of “dissident” Czechoslovak exiles like Osuský and Prchala as counterproductive, selfish, petty, and unpatriotic: “There were several attempts to create a schism and to set up an opposition within our liberation movement. In two cases, Poland and France, all the complications were solved for us by the events themselves... The French politicians [and Osuský] who share the responsibility for Munich were disposed of for us by Adolf Hitler in his crushing of France.”⁶¹ Osuský later filed a libel suit against Bohuš Beneš and the *Čechoslovák* for the assaults on himself and Prchala. He argued that his and General Prchala’s actions in 1939 were for the good of the Czechoslovak nation and were not an attempt to create any disunity in the liberation movement: “There was no organized liberation movement until the setting up of the Czechoslovak National Committee November 16, 1939. A ‘schism’ could be created only in a recognized, established institution, to the authority of which every Czechoslovak national was bound to submit.”⁶² Although Osuský remained a member of the London government until March 1942, he was never an influential voice, and his plans for Czechoslovak liberation were silenced along with those of General Prchala and those of former Prime Minister Hodža. Edvard Beneš’s vision of a social democratic, Prague-centric Czechoslovakia reliant on his authority brushed aside other exiles’

⁶⁰ Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 126.

⁶¹ “Correspondence with Lawyers,” Folder 6, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁶² *Ibid.*

dissenting opinions and their calls for such things as future increased Slovak autonomy or conservative republican principles.⁶³

The fall of the French government, the ascendancy of Churchill, and the isolation of Osuský garnered Edvard Beneš the undisputed leadership of the Czechoslovak exile movement. On July 21, 1940, the British Government recognized Beneš's National Committee in London as the "Provisional Czechoslovak Government," bestowing on the organization a greater level of authority and power. At the head of this provisional government, Beneš was acknowledged by Great Britain as the "President of Czechoslovakia." The exiles surrounding Beneš had succeeded in achieving the unity necessary for increased political power.

This unity, however, came at a steep price. In an article in the *Čechoslovák*, Bohuš Beneš described the receipt of provisional government status in the following manner:

The whole of our movement, although it had encountered many difficulties and made many mistakes, as a unit presented itself in a very healthy light, because it overcame all its internal crises, without any dangerous disturbances or political divagations being noticed in the substance of our movement from the outside world. It can be trusted that our people at home will be more grateful to us for this asset of relative unity than for anything else we shall succeed elsewhere to do for them.⁶⁴

The provisional government "overcame its internal crises" as Bohuš Beneš describes by effectively expelling any controversial or dissident members. The strongest Czechoslovak leaders in March 1939, Prchala and Osuský, were silenced and removed

⁶³ General Prchala was not allowed to join the London government or participate in the exile army, and Hodža eventually broke off from Beneš's group to form an opposition Slovak National Committee. See: Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 184-5; and "Correspondence with Lawyers," Folder 6, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁶⁴ "Court Proceedings," Folder 7, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

from the London government, creating a group centered on President Beneš that was far from representative of the Czechoslovak people. Bohuš Beneš delineated five separate attempts at schism that were effectively squashed by the London government: Prchala, Osuský, other individuals who feared the “democratic world drifted definitely to the extreme left” (i.e. conservative politicians), Hodža’s “separatist” Slovak National Committee, and the Czechoslovak Communists before June 1941.⁶⁵ Accordingly, with these schisms contained and the instigators expunged, the Provisional Government in London represented only a limited political section of the Czechoslovak nation. The opinions of moderate Czech democratic socialists were well represented, but conservatives, communists, and Slovaks had little voice in Beneš’s government. As Osuský and Hodža protested: “Beneš’s organs/ Government and State Council/ do not represent the nation, nor its groups, tendencies or sentiments.”⁶⁶

The Provisional Czechoslovak Government at the end of 1940 was an undemocratically established government of a nominally democratic nation. It acted as a representative body of the Czechoslovak people, but was far from representative in its composition. Exile organizations vying for international recognition cannot afford to act democratically, though. The need to project an image of unity necessitates the elimination of any dissension and creates an exile group that is fairly dogmatic in its worldview.⁶⁷ Beneš’s government, physically disconnected from the nation it attempted to represent, gained authority not from some semi-organic process of leader-subject

⁶⁵ Ibid. Between September 1939 and June 1941 the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact prevented the Czechoslovak Communists from fully cooperating with the noncommunist exiles in London, and even after the German invasion in 1941 the Communists did not officially become a part of Beneš’s government, though they did assist and advise the London group and were influential in the domestic resistance.

⁶⁶ They continue, “Especially, they do not represent the Slovaks.” “Memorial of the Recognition of Dr. Beneš as President of Czechoslovakia and of his Government: Annexe A,” Folder 13, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁶⁷ Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, 41.

communication and legitimation, but from the rigid, erratic, pragmatic, and at times arbitrary processes of international recognition. Osuský argued that:

The source of authority of Dr. Beneš's Government does reside neither in the Czechoslovak Constitution, nor in the will of the Czechoslovak people. It has its source in the National Committee... Who was the National Committee which established Dr. Beneš's provisional Government? Eight gentlemen who in November 1939 constituted themselves into a 'National Committee'... The Czechoslovak London Government being the creation of the National Committee, it is pure accident that its head is Dr. Beneš.⁶⁸

Although he was a highly prominent, respected leader and in hindsight may have been the best man for the job, Beneš was never necessarily the logical or inevitable choice to head Czechoslovakia's fight for liberation. His ascendancy came after great political maneuver and inter-exile wrangling, and indeed also had much to thank from good fortune and "accident."

⁶⁸ "Dr. Beneš's Government in London," Folder 5, Box 44, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

Chapter Two

The Scramble for International Recognition

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Edvard Beneš's adamant stance for the necessity of a unified exile organization under his leadership was rooted in Beneš's understanding of the importance of achieving the highest level of international recognition for his exiled, anti-Nazi Czechs. Separated from citizens at home, Beneš knew that for there to be any hope of regaining authority from the Nazi and Czech administration in the Protectorate and ensuring the renewal of the Czechoslovak state, his Czech allies would have to obtain the title of "government-in-exile" and use this powerful international recognition as a replacement for lost internal power and control. The political theories of Max Weber, as interpreted by sociologist Joseph Bensman, suggest that "a regime based exclusively on 'pure legitimacy,' *legitimacy as belief*, cannot exist" divorced from some degree of legitimate state violence or naked coercion.¹ Therefore for an exile government like Beneš's to improve its tenuous authority it had to fervently defend its "pure legitimacy" through self-justifying logic and arguments, while simultaneously enlisting the support of other governments to act as substitutes for its loss of the state's monopoly of violence: "A final function of legitimacy is the ability of a regime to trade off its internal power for international recognition and to use its international recognition as a justification for its power within

¹ Joseph Bensman, "Max Weber's Concept of Legitimacy: An Evaluation," in *Conflict and Control: Challenge to Legitimacy of Modern Governments*, ed. Arthur J. Vidich and Ronald M. Glassman (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975), 43 [emphasis original].

its domestic society.”² Beneš and his exile community during the war were conjoined with the needs of their sponsor nations, and their only means of gaining increased authority resided in their ability to play the game of international diplomacy and recognition bestowment.

Yossi Shain in his study of political émigrés divides the exile’s quest for legitimacy and power into the dual processes of building national loyalty and securing international recognition.³ In the early stages of development of the Czechoslovak exile government, Beneš focused the majority of his efforts towards building diplomatic recognition for his homeless organization.⁴ This half of Shain’s theoretical division of legitimation was emphasized for pragmatic reasons, namely the difficulty in cultivating national loyalty divorced from coercive means in a home territory so effectively sealed off by the Nazis and paralyzed with sectarian disunity between its various ethnic groups. The attainment of full recognition for the Czechoslovaks in London was a difficult road, though, and Beneš would find himself more than once lost in the muddled sea of diplomatic confusion, national self-interests, and competing claims for authority. Shain describes the perilous, impotent position inhabited by political exiles reliant on the authority of more powerful nations and enslaved by the inconsistent and ambiguous rules of international recognition bestowment as follows:

All governments are free to adopt and interpret the concepts and doctrines of recognition in accordance with their own foreign policy objectives and ideologies. The result, or perhaps the cause, of the lack of settled criteria for diplomatic recognition, as also for recognition of exile organizations, is

² Bensman, “Max Weber’s Concept of Legitimacy,” 47.

³ Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 163.

⁴ Vojtěch Mastný, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 144: “In reality [Beneš] regarded the domestic front as secondary in importance.”

the use of recognition as a political device to support or undermine another government.⁵

As the Czechoslovaks in London vied for a return to power in their occupied state, they were forced to submit to the Allies' pragmatic use of recognition as a political tool, while struggling to retain some governmental autonomy and avoid being reduced to the status of mere political pawn.

The British recognition of the "Provisional Czecho-Slovak Government" on July 24, 1940 was far from an unequivocal, unabashed sponsorship of Beneš's Czechoslovak National Committee as the single legitimate Czechoslovak authority.⁶ The recognition came with many stipulations and much hesitancy on the part of the British. Recognition was not legally binding and the "provisional" status of the government was thoroughly emphasized. Beneš claimed in July of 1940 that his government "was in a similar position as the Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, and other invaded nations," but this was far from the truth.⁷ Several conflicts prevented the easy receipt of unhindered recognition. Firstly, the British clashed with the Czechoslovaks over the issue of territorial integrity, boundary continuity, and the legal standing of the Munich Agreement. Upon receiving the status of provisional government from the British, Beneš proclaimed that "the future borders of Czecho-Slovakia must be approximately the same as the old, for obvious reasons."⁸ As a signatory at Munich, Great Britain was initially reluctant to destroy the

⁵ Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 113.

⁶ The Czechoslovak exile organization in London will generally be referred to according to chronology throughout this chapter and by the specific name it was given by the Allied nations at particular moments in time. The precise title of an exile organization can convey a great deal of meaning, as an exile government and a "provisional" exile government, for example, generally signify practically and symbolically quite different things.

⁷ "Dr. Benes heads Czech assembly set up in Britain," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 24, 1940, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

territorial compromises made in 1938 and only first communicated a desire to negate the accord to Beneš on November 11, 1940, waiting another two years until August 1942 to announce officially the Munich Agreement's dissolution.⁹ British leaders, seeing the fragility of the young Czechoslovak nation they had, two decades earlier, helped to create, were reluctant to commit themselves to any concrete boundaries for a postwar Czechoslovakia. To complicate the matter further, Great Britain had exchanged diplomats with the independent Slovak state and disagreed with Beneš over the desirability and feasibility of a reunited Czechoslovakia after the war.¹⁰ For this reason, the British would only provisionally recognize a Czechoslovak exile government, as the idea of a united "Czechoslovak" entity in 1940 was an artificial construction.¹¹

A second area of contention between the Provisional Czechoslovak Government and the Allied Powers was over the Czechoslovaks' insistence that "Dr. Beneš personified the legal and constitutional continuity of the First Czechoslovak Republic, as his resignation as President of the Republic is to be held invalid."¹² After being recognized by Great Britain as the head of the London government on July 21, 1940, Beneš began referring to himself once more as the President of Czechoslovakia. From the day of his resignation on October 5, 1938 to the date of provisional recognition two years later, Beneš always signed his letters as "the former President of the Czechoslovak

⁹ "Czechoslovak Frontiers," *The Times*, Aug 6, 1942, p. 3.

¹⁰ The autonomous Slovak state took over the administration of the Slovak lands in March 1939, half a year before war officially broke out in Europe. Great Britain did not recognize *de jure* the Slovak fascists, but at the beginning of the war did bestow *de facto* recognition in the form of exchanged diplomats and normalized relations.

¹¹ Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 115.

¹² "Mr. Osuský's Dismissal by Beneš: Note by Osuský," Folder 4, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

Republic.¹³ Now, with renewed authority and the centering of exile rule in London after the loss of power by General Prchala in Poland and Štefan Osuský in France, Beneš christened himself the Republic's president and advanced an argument for the legal continuity of his authority from before the Munich controversy to the present.¹⁴ His argument, which was unacceptable to his antagonists Osuský, Hodža, and others, and which the Allied Powers at the moment would not recognize, centered on the supposition that all political development that had occurred within Czechoslovakia after September 21, 1938 was illegal because the cession of Czechoslovak territory without a vote by Parliament went against the Czechoslovak Constitution and was thus unconstitutional.¹⁵ Beneš adamantly asserted that his resignation came under duress and was a culmination of all the illegal acts perpetrated against Czechoslovakia from September 21 onwards. But this argument stood on flimsy legal grounds, and Great Britain and the United States were as of yet unwilling to declare the seemingly lawful election of Emil Hácha in November 1938 to the presidency of the Second Czechoslovak Republic as void.¹⁶ Beneš was accepted as a provisional leader of the Czechoslovakian exiles not because the Allies agreed with Beneš's assertion of continued authority, but simply because at the present Beneš was the most qualified to lead the imperfect composition of exiled Czechs and Slovaks. In other words, Beneš was conditionally accepted as President because there was no other choice: "The conclusion is that it would hardly be possible in present

¹³ "Correspondence with Lawyers," Folder 6, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

¹⁴ Beneš, the expert at strategic political maneuver, always seemed to know just the right moment to strike during political disputes, and perfectly timed the fall of France and Osuský's reduction of power to advance his finely constructed argument for continued legitimacy.

¹⁵ "Dr. Beneš's Government in London: Article by Osuský," Folder 5, Box 44, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

¹⁶ Foreign Office Memorandum for Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 1, 1941, President's Secretary's Files (PSF) Safe Files: Czechoslovakia Index, Franklin D. Roosevelt Digital Archives, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

circumstance to arrange for a Czechoslovak government and National Council which would be more representative than the administration of Dr. Beneš.”¹⁷

Allied hopes for a “representative” composition to the exile government would remain unsatisfactorily fulfilled, as infighting between Czechs and Slovaks, liberals and conservatives would continue to plague Beneš’s group. For receipt of provisional government status, “one of the main conditions made by His Majesty’s Government... was that Dr. Beneš should be able to secure greater unity among the Czechs and Slovaks abroad.”¹⁸ The British deemed there to be sufficient Slovak representation in the London group in July 1940 with the inclusion of Štefan Osuský and Milan Hodža and with Slovaks comprising “six of thirteen members of the Government.” In truth, however, this apparent Czech and Slovak unity would prove ephemeral as Osuský and Hodža were gradually pushed out of the exile government and the remaining three Slovaks had minimal sway with their ethnic brethren at home.¹⁹

Štefan Osuský would eventually be forced to leave the government because he refused to accept Beneš’s argument for the legal continuity of his presidency. Osuský’s personal wartime documents show the fervor with which he opposed Beneš’s illegal and “dictatorial” rule in the government-in-exile. Osuský claimed that after Beneš’s resignation in 1938, “he was never elected President or anything of that sort” and that “he obtained the recognition by a foreign power of the Presidential authority not due to him.”²⁰ Osuský criticized not only Beneš’s Machiavellian political maneuvering, but

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. The memorandum claims there were six Slovaks in the London government but in fact there were only five, as Jan Masaryk’s family was originally from Moravia near the Slovak border but was not in actuality Slovak, and Jan himself was born and grew up in Czech Prague.

²⁰ “Dr. Beneš’s Government in London: Article by Osuský,” Folder 5, Box 44, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives; and “Memorial of the Recognition of Dr. Beneš as President of

objected to the whole artificial process of political legitimacy through international recognition: “recognition is not a constitutive act... recognition is a declarative act by which is taken public official knowledge of a thing which already existed.”²¹ For exile governments during World War II, though, recognition had to be used as the cause for increased internal power back home, not simply as the result of this domestic authority. Osuský was right to point to the inordinate level of power bestowed by imperfect acts of recognition, but for the political exile these processes are a necessity.

Even with all these internal conflicts, Great Britain did choose to bestow an intermediate level of recognition on the London Czechoslovaks in the summer of 1940. Part of the decision to grant provisional status to Beneš’s government resided in the thinking that Beneš, however imperfect, was the best option to lead, and after the fall of France was possibly the only option. The London Czechoslovaks also had a steady, powerful advocate in British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Establishing himself as the mirror opposite of Neville Chamberlain, Churchill was an unwavering ally of the Czechs and President Beneš and an ardent enemy of the Munich Agreement. In January 1940, before the Provisional Czechoslovak Government had been recognized and at a time when many were skeptical of the right of an independent Czechoslovak state to exist, Churchill eagerly defended the nation’s historical and lawful integrity: “Eight millions of Czechs – a nation famous and recognisable as a distinct community for many centuries past in Europe – writhe in agony under the German and Nazi tyranny.”²²

Czechoslovakia and of his Government: Annexe A,” Folder 13, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

²¹ “Dr. Beneš’s Government in London: Article by Osuský,” Folder 5, Box 44, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

²² Martin Gilbert, ed., *The Churchill War Papers, Volume 1: At the Admiralty* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 697.

Forced to refer to Czechs and Slovaks separately for the time being due to the independence of the Slovak Nazi-satellite state, Churchill was still a constant campaigner for the “Czech Government of Dr. Beneš,” and by the summer of 1940 he would unquestionably declare the Beneš group to be “the sole representative authority and lawful Government” of the, albeit ambiguous, “Czechoslovak” state.²³

While the London Czechoslovak government in 1940 and 1941 received considerable support from their sponsor nation Great Britain, other foreign governments were less willing to bestow authority on such a conflicted exile organization. The United States, in particular, was wary of recognizing Beneš’s group while a Czechoslovak government still remained in Prague and while the reputation of Beneš amongst occupied Czechs was unclear. George Kennan, previously a member of the American Consulate in Prague and in 1941 the first secretary of the American Embassy in Berlin, discouraged any actions by the United States that might compromise the authority of the Hácha government within the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as seen in this February 5, 1941 Department of State note:

Mr. Kennan expressed the strong feeling that this government should not give any formal recognition to the Czech Committee in London, thus causing embarrassment to the Hácha government, and that we should manifest a certain understanding of the position of the Hácha government. After all, said Mr. Kennan, the rallying of the Czech people in any ultimate revolution against German domination will center around the Czech government in Prague, and not around any absentee committee.²⁴

²³ Martin Gilbert, ed., *The Churchill War Papers, Volume 2: Never Surrender* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 695.

²⁴ Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 166; See also George Kennan, *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 239. For further discussion of the role of Hácha’s Protectorate government, see Chapter 3, pages 77-84.

Sufficient sympathy in the United States for the cause of the Czechoslovak exiles in London generated a moderate degree of support for Beneš's group, but the worries of prominent foreign diplomats like George Kennan and a general isolationist aura that aimed at avoiding German provocation allowed the London Czechoslovaks only the limited title in American eyes of "Czech National Committee": not an exile government but a group of concerned émigrés.²⁵

In the first half of 1941, the Provisional Czechoslovak Government's attempts to gain full diplomatic recognition were continually met with British hesitancy and American opposition. In April, President Beneš sent a request to Winston Churchill for increased exile status and authority for his government. Churchill seemed moderately supportive of such an action: "I see no reason why we should not give the Czechs the same recognition as we have given the Poles, and encourage the Americans to follow our example. In neither case should we be committed to territorial frontiers."²⁶ Others, though, were more hesitant to offer such a deal to the Czechoslovak exiles as long as the status of the Munich Agreement, Beneš's continuity of authority, the Czech-Slovak divide, and the legitimacy of the Hácha regime remained such contentious issues. The United States, motivated in part by a distrust of British colonialism and economic imperialism, was quick to condemn any deals that might address the postwar status of

²⁵ Whether or not George Kennan's confidence in the unifying power of the Hácha government was at the time justified remains debatable, as Kennan's World War II observations must be taken with a grain of salt. The same Kennan in April of 1941 also enthusiastically declared that: "It cannot be said that German policy is motivated by any sadistic desire to see other people suffer under German rule. On the contrary, Germans are most anxious that their subjects should be happy in their care" ("Shattered Peace," *New York Times*, June 12, 1977, p. 236). Even so, many Allied politicians feared that recognition of President Beneš would worsen life for Czechs in the occupied Protectorate, as Hácha remained a legally elected leader, still worked to temper German aggression in the Protectorate, and acted as a productive conduit between the Allies and the Czech underground. See Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 162-8.

²⁶ Martin Gilbert, ed., *The Churchill War Papers, Volume 3: The Ever-Widening War* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 516.

countries such as Czechoslovakia.²⁷ In a July 14, 1941 letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Winston Churchill, Roosevelt complained of the “rumors regarding trades or deals which the British Government is alleged to be making with some of the occupied nations... as for example the stupid story that you have promised to set up Yugoslavia [Czechoslovakia?] again as it formerly existed.”²⁸ Continuing, Roosevelt stressed that “there is dissention and argument among other groups such as the Czechs and Slovaks” and that “it is much too early for any of us to make any commitments for the very good reason that both Britain and the United States want assurance of future peace by disarming all trouble makers and secondly by considering the possibility of reviving small states in the interest of harmony.”²⁹ British tentativeness and American opposition to increased Czechoslovak recognition guaranteed that on the eve of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Beneš group in London enjoyed the lowest status of all exile organizations at that time. Of the exile governments of Belgium, Greece, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Yugoslavia also in London in June 1941, only the Czechoslovak Government was referred to under the lesser title of “provisional” government.³⁰

On June 22, 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa and the German *Wehrmacht* streamed into the Soviet Union, breaking the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of 1939 and thrusting the USSR into World War II on the side of the Allies. This act of Nazi aggression, as was the case with Poland in 1939 and France in 1940, helped

²⁷ Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. I, 221.

²⁸ Brackets original.

²⁹ Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. I, 221.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 206.

propel Beneš and his exile government towards a higher level of international recognition and authority. With their unconditional recognition of the Czechoslovak Government in London on July 17, 1941, the Soviet Union acted as the catalyst that eventually garnered for Beneš the unequivocal recognition of all Allied nations. One question remains though: why did Josef Stalin and the Soviets so quickly and unquestionably back the London Czechoslovaks?

After the German invasion of the Czech lands on March 15, 1939, the USSR was one of the most supportive nations of the Czechoslovak political exiles, expressing solidarity with Beneš's protests and actions abroad.³¹ After the signing of the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact in August 1939, the Soviet relationship with Czechoslovaks in London became muddled and difficult, and by early 1940 the Soviets had evicted the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow and accepted a diplomatic envoy from the newly independent fascist Slovak state. Relationships weren't completely broken off, though, and personal as well as underground contacts were maintained, as explained by Beneš's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs during the war, Hubert Ripka:

Since, in the new situation, it was impossible to collaborate officially with the Soviet Union, we... did nothing which might prejudice or prevent the renewal of cooperation at the earliest possible moment... Moreover, even in that period, there was no interruption of the personal contacts and exchanges of information between ourselves and important Soviet representatives in London, Paris, Washington and elsewhere.³²

By the end of 1940, the Provisional Czechoslovak Government through the Czech underground (the Central Leadership of Home Resistance, or the ÚVOD) had

³¹ Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 149.

³² Kurt Glaser, *Profile of an Exile Politician* (Washington, DC: Overseas Research, Inc., 1954). See also "Defamation of an Exile: Letter by Hubert Ripka," Box 4, Ladislav Feierabend, Papers 1922-1969, Hoover Archive.

reestablished contact with Soviets.³³ When the German attack on the USSR came in the summer of 1941, the Czechoslovaks in London were in a firm position from which to renew friendly and allied relations with the Soviets.

Once communication was reestablished between Stalin and President Beneš, there were several reasons for the Soviets to want to solidify their Czechoslovak ties with an official recognition of the London government. For one, the Czechoslovak intelligence center in London was highly esteemed by both the Soviets and the British. Some of the first intercepts of German plans to invade the Soviet Union came from Czech sources in the spring of 1941. Secret links between the Czech and Soviet intelligence systems spurred on early friendly relations between the two states. In the *quid pro quo* of international relations, a well-constructed intelligence network was one thing the Czechoslovaks could offer in exchange for increased political status.³⁴

Furthermore, although not a communist and very much a supporter of “imperialist capitalist” policies and governments, Beneš was arguably “reliable” in Soviet eyes. He was a left-leaning social democrat, as was the majority of the London government, and was a far more acceptable choice vis-à-vis political persuasion than the conservatives Osuský, Prchala, Hodža and Hácha. Indeed, attacks on conservative Czechoslovak politicians increased upon the USSR’s entry into the war. On July 1, 1941, five members of the exile Czechoslovak government, in a possible attempt to distance the London administration from anti-Soviet elements, accused Štefan Osuský of

³³ ÚVOD is the Czech acronym for *Ústřední vedení odboje domácího*: the Central Leadership of Home Resistance, or alternatively the Central Committee for Home Resistance. For detailed analysis of the role of internal resistance, see Chapter 3.

³⁴ Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 168; Edvard Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš: from Munich to New War and New Victory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 150. For more on the Czechoslovak intelligence center, see page 57.

committing treasonous acts in his supposedly botched handling of the withdrawal of Czechoslovak troops from France in 1940. Although this event happened over a year earlier, Czechoslovak politicians waited until the entry of the Soviet Union into the war before they attempted to punish their colleague and remove him from the provisional government: a suspicious suggestion of the USSR's influence in Beneš's government and an indication of the importance of recognition receipt to a struggling exile organization.³⁵

Historian Josef Kalvoda argues that Stalin was content with Beneš because the Czechoslovak President had "proved his loyalty" with his cooperation in the 1937 Tukhachevsky affair: Stalin's purge trial of the highest ranking Marshal of the Soviet Union in which Beneš had given "credence to the fabricated evidence used in the trial."³⁶ Whether or not this previous event significantly improved Soviet relations, Beneš made sure to build from any possible previous goodwill he might have shared with the Soviet dictator and went on a campaign in the summer of 1941 of Soviet courtship. He made sympathetic comments about the political, moral, and military strength of Czechoslovakia's eastern Slav neighbor, as seen in a July 5, 1941 note by Beneš's assistant Jaromír Smutný: "Edvard Beneš expressed his appreciation of the military preparedness of the USSR and of the influence that country's entry into the war would have on the international recognition of the Czechoslovak government and on internal changes within the latter...[and on] the post-war social development of the Czechoslovak

³⁵ "Mr. Osuský's Dismissal by Beneš: Note by Osuský," Folder 4, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

³⁶ Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, 121. See also Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš*, 47; Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 26.

State.”³⁷ Beneš knew that if he could achieve full Soviet recognition in the summer of 1941, recognition by previously hesitant powers would most likely follow, and so he did all he could to make himself and the London exile government politically appealing. If it wished to survive and prosper, the exile government was forced to project a pro-Soviet philosophy that was not necessarily shared by all its members, all in hopes garnering desperately needed authority-bestowing recognition.

The Soviets were also quick to recognize an exile Czechoslovak government not because they were particularly fond of the Beneš government, but because they operated under a paradigm of liberal recognition bestowment at the beginning of the war. In a policy that seemed to boil down to a courtship of friendly neighbors, the USSR immediately sent similar letters of unconditional recognition to the exile governments of Poland and Yugoslavia, governments that, unlike Czechoslovakia, would lose Soviet recognition by the end of the war.³⁸ From 1941 onwards, the Soviets were usually the first to pressure the other Allies into bestowing greater authority on a certain group of exiles. In June 1943, for example, Stalin was eager to recognize the young French National Committee of Liberation set up by Charles De Gaulle in Algiers and was reluctantly forced to wait only after being informed by Churchill that it was “unlikely that the British, and still more that the United States Government, will recognise this Committee for some time.”³⁹

³⁷ Libuše Otáhalová and Milada Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939-1943* (Prague: Academia, 1966), 236.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁹ USSR Foreign Ministry Commission for the Publication of Diplomatic Documents, *Correspondence Between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 139.

Stalin and the Soviet Union seemed to be looking towards the future of Europe almost immediately after Germany invaded in July 1941. Even as early as November 1941, at a time when the Soviet Union lay close to collapse under the weight of the German Blitzkrieg, Stalin pressured the Allied Powers to come to an agreement on “the plans for the post-war organization of peace” and to form a policy for the transition of power of the governments-in-exile.⁴⁰ Accordingly, recognition was bestowed on the London Czechoslovak government not necessarily out of complete support of its policies and composition, but because Beneš presented the best and easiest option for the moment. Looking back on the early war period, Stalin admitted that he had advised the Czechoslovak communist leader Klement Gottwald to “work with Beneš, reach an agreement with him, accept him as president” because Stalin “wanted to avoid similar problems and complications with Beneš” as he had experienced in 1943 with the Polish government-in-exile.⁴¹ During wartime, governments cannot necessarily afford to be overly selective with qualifications for allied exile organizations, and pragmatism became a powerful source of Beneš’s receipt of recognized authority in 1941.

President Beneš quickly and deftly after receiving unconditional Soviet support turned around and used the USSR’s full recognition of his government to pressure Great Britain and the United States into bestowing a similarly high level of authority.⁴² As new allies in the fight against Nazism, Great Britain and the Soviet Union were initially compelled to take similar stances on foreign policy issues as a sign of union and solidarity. Differing levels of exile recognition and a lingering American and British

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴¹ Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 195. See also Jaroslav Opat, *O novou demokracii 1945-1948* (Prague: Čs. akademie věd, 1966), 37. For more on Polish-Soviet relations, see pages 58-9.

⁴² Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 185.

nominal recognition of the Hácha and Slovak regimes in the former Czechoslovakia put, in the words of Franklin Roosevelt, “all of us in a bad light throughout the world to have [Stalin] recognizing one government while we and the British recognize[ed] another.”⁴³ Beneš knew of this pressure to present a united Allied front and insisted on a quick signing of the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty of recognition in the first half of July as a means of accelerating receipt of international recognition. In doing so, Beneš ignored the plea from his Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, to consult first the British, and he pushed forward Soviet-Czechoslovak relations without the consent of the Czechoslovaks’ sponsor nation.⁴⁴ As John Winant, the American Ambassador to Great Britain, related in a July 26, 1941 letter to President Roosevelt, “the unconditional recognition of Dr. Beneš’s Government by Russia presented the British with a *fait accompli* as they had not been previously consulted, and to a certain degree their hand was forced.”⁴⁵

On July 18, 1941, one day after the Soviet Union officially recognized the Beneš government, Great Britain reluctantly set aside its previous concerns and criticisms and bestowed an increased, if not completely unconditional, recognition on the Czechoslovak Government. The British Government had at the time of Soviet-Czechoslovak recognition been dissatisfied predominantly with the unbalanced nature of the provisional government’s composition of “the four principle minorities of the former Czechoslovak State” and did not believe that the exile government had successfully been made as

⁴³ Susan Butler, ed., *My Dear Mr. Stalin: The Complete Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 291. Quoted actually from a 1945 letter from Roosevelt to Stalin that referenced the conflicting Polish provisional governments and inconsistency in Allied recognition, but the Allied viewpoint that the USSR, United States, and Great Britain must be unified in their diplomacy vis-à-vis exile governments was the same in 1941.

⁴⁴ Otáhalová and Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky*, 236.

⁴⁵ Letter, John G. Winant to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 26, 1941, President's Secretary's Files (PSF) Safe Files: Czechoslovakia Index, Franklin D. Roosevelt Digital Archives, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

representative as possible.⁴⁶ Furthermore, there was significant British concern in the summer of 1941 that recognition of the London exiles “might force the Hácha Government in Prague to take a stand against Dr. Beneš or be ejected from office by the Germans,” and the British hoped increased recognition “would not jeopardize the collaboration at present existing between [Beneš] and the Hácha Government, and would not be detrimental to the Allied cause.”⁴⁷ But these British concerns, also shared by the Americans, were on July 18 “superseded by the act of formal recognition which the British Government felt it advisable to extend following the step taken in this regard by the Russian Government.”⁴⁸ British hesitancy was brushed aside by aggressive Soviet diplomacy and political maneuvering by President Beneš. The “Provisional Czechoslovak Government” became the fully recognized “Czechoslovak Government” not because its status had improved amongst compatriots at home, but because diplomatic tides had turned and “legitimacy” was declaratively bestowed from above.⁴⁹

The British agreed on July 18 to drop the “provisional” status of the Czechoslovak Government, but still attempted to hold on to some diplomatic qualifications for the postwar period. Still, by declaring the Beneš government to be no longer provisional and by bestowing it with the same level of authority as all other recognized governments-in-exiles, Great Britain was giving full *de facto* recognition to Beneš’s legitimacy. Great Britain made it clear that no territorial guarantees were to be made for the postwar Czechoslovakia (i.e. the Munich Agreement would not be officially

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ For an examination of internal Czechoslovak opinion during the war, the underground resistance movement, public feelings towards Beneš’s London government, and London’s relationship with the Hácha regime, see Chapter 3.

denounced) and that they still would not accept Beneš's argument for the "juridical continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic" and of his authority.⁵⁰ The Soviet Union, though, had no qualms in accepting the Czechoslovak stance on these two issues, and the weight of British opinion was considerably minimized by this second foreign power's support and full recognition the London Czechs.⁵¹ On July 30, 1941, following the Soviet and British examples, the American Government in an attempt to "give further encouragement to the Czechoslovak population at home and to show them that their leaders in London are regarded as being on the same level with the other exiled national leaders," entered into formal relations with what it still referred to as the "Provisional Czechoslovak Government"; America being still half a year away from entering the war and more isolated from the European conflict. Still, although small conflicts still lingered between certain Allied governments and Beneš's Czechoslovaks, full diplomatic recognition was all but assured by these July 1941 acts of recognition.⁵² The Czechoslovak Government in London became the single legitimate authority representing the dismembered and enslaved Czechoslovak state in the summer of 1941. At least, it was seen as such in the eyes of the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States, and in the eyes of the few Czechoslovak politicians who had staked their return to power on the future of their Allied nation benefactors.

Exile governments never receive recognition from established governments without offering some reward in return. Recognition is not a simple declarative act of agreement with the clear moral right of a particular group to rule, but is a dynamic

⁵⁰ Foreign Office Memorandum for Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 1, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

⁵¹ Otáhalová and Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky*, 248.

⁵² Foreign Office Memorandum for Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 1, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

political tool used primarily by most governments for pragmatic reasons. It is generally easier for a government to avoid conflict and inconvenience by recognizing the *de facto* controller of a territory's monopoly of violence, so for the receipt of recognition, "political exiles must convince their potential patrons that the latter cannot dispense with the military or political services the exiles offer."⁵³ Ideological motivations can play a significant role, but usually pragmatic political concerns carry the day.

For the London Czechoslovaks, recognition came by composing compelling arguments for why the Allies needed what the Beneš group could offer. Recognition was maintained throughout the war because the Czechoslovaks could follow through with their promises without posing significant political concerns for any of the three Allied Powers. As previously mentioned, the successful Czechoslovak intelligence center in London was highly appealing militarily for the Allies and a powerful impetus for continued Allied recognition. Run by one of Beneš's most loyal advisors, Colonel František Moravec, Czechoslovak intelligence gathered accurate information on planned German actions from Czech underground, civilian, military, and communist sources in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as from a few German informants. Czechoslovak intelligence sources were some of the first to unveil German plans for the invasions of Yugoslavia as well as the Soviet Union. In part because of this high quality of Czechoslovak intelligence networks, Beneš's government became a trusted source of information and advice for the Allies throughout the war.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the authority of Beneš himself increased as the Allies came to see the President as a knowledgeable expert on Eastern European affairs and a skilled

⁵³ Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 125.

⁵⁴ Edvard Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš*, 150, 164n; Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 168.

mediator of intra-Allied disagreements. As tensions between the Soviets and the Anglo-Americans increased throughout the war, Beneš was continually looked to as a kind of “bridge between East and West.”⁵⁵ Several prominent British political acquaintances, including Lady Violet Bonham Carter, the future President of the British Liberal Party and a close confidant of Winston Churchill, spoke for long hours with President Beneš about the Soviet Union and found him “better informed than most people about the ‘riddle wrapped in an enigma.’”⁵⁶ Conversations between Beneš and Churchill or Beneš and Roosevelt generally centered on the current state of affairs with the USSR, and Beneš on multiple occasions was used as a messenger between Stalin and the other Allied heads of state.⁵⁷

Additionally, on April 21, 1943 the Soviet Union severed its ties with the Polish Government in London due to the exile government’s unfavorable political composition and over controversy surrounding supposed atrocities committed by the Red Army during its 1939 invasion of eastern Poland.⁵⁸ As a huge rift opened between the Polish exiles and the Allied Powers in the spring of 1943, the well-respected Beneš was looked to act as a negotiator between the London Poles, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill for the

⁵⁵ This metaphor also extended, in Beneš’s mind, to the future position of Czechoslovakia after the war, and Beneš was an adamant proponent of drawing security and influence both from the Soviet Union and from Great Britain/The United States. Beneš’s Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, was vocally less enthusiastic over the idea, once cynically asserting: “I don’t like this bridge idea. Cows like to stop on a bridge and shit on it.” See Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 169; “Soviet Treaty with Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, November 30, 1943, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Gilbert, ed., *Churchill War Papers, Volume 1: At the Admiralty*, 437. The comment is taken from a November 28, 1939 letter from Lady Violet Bonham Carter to Winston Churchill on the subject of Lady Violet’s two hour talk with Beneš.

⁵⁷ Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, V.II, 651; and, Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 133-4.

⁵⁸ During the Soviet-German division of Poland in September 1939, Soviet authorities executed over 20,000 Polish military officers and political prisoners in the Katyń Forest west of Smolensk, Russia. In 1943 Germans discovered the mass graves and used them as anti-Soviet propaganda, loudly broadcasting the atrocities internationally. This event initiated the break of already tenuous ties between the Soviets and the London Poles. The Soviet Union virulently denied its role in the Katyń Massacre until 1990.

remainder of the war, and lingering disagreements between the Allies and the London Czechoslovaks seemed to be forgotten. Indeed, communications between the three Allied Powers as the war progressed seemed less and less to mention President Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government as the composition and diplomatic status of the exile governments of Poland and later Yugoslavia became far more contentious and controversial issues.⁵⁹ When Allied leaders did discuss Beneš, his name usually surfaced only in connection with his role in mitigating disputes with other governments-in-exile, as seen in a January 5, 1944 letter from Churchill to Stalin: “President Beneš is coming to see me today. He is a wise man and should help in bringing Poland to reason.”⁶⁰ As the war progressed, Czechoslovak recognition was ensured and maintained by an increased Allied respect for Beneš’s wisdom and intelligence, by the Allied use of Beneš as a moderator and problem solver, and by a feeling on the part of the Allies that, in comparison to other chaotic, divided and contentious governments-in-exile like Poland and Yugoslavia, the liberal social democratic Czechoslovak Government was politically satisfactory.⁶¹ If the Allies were to take away recognition from President Beneš, as expressed by Winston Churchill, “we should not get anyone good in his place.”⁶²

Beyond these tangible political justifications for deserving recognition, the Czechoslovaks in London made symbolic or representative gestures designed to garner ideological support from the Americans, Soviets, and British. This symbolism and

⁵⁹ See the reduction of Beneš and Czechoslovak references over time in Butler, ed., *My Dear Mr. Stalin*; USSR Foreign Ministry, *Correspondence*; and, Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt*.

⁶⁰ USSR Foreign Ministry, *Correspondence*, 185.

⁶¹ With the emergence of Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia’s resistance, the Soviet Union more and more withdrew support from the conservative, exiled Yugoslav monarchy in London, advocating for some kind of compromised understanding between the two Yugoslav factions; an understanding that eventually led to Tito gaining power and the monarchy not returning home after the war.

⁶² USSR Foreign Ministry, *Correspondence*, 134. Quoted from a May 12, 1943 letter from Churchill to Stalin after Soviet withdrawal of Polish recognition addressing the danger of changing horses in midstream.

rhetoric had the dual effect of not only projecting an image of legitimate national unity to the Allied Powers, but also of self-justifying the rule of London Czechoslovaks amongst themselves. Yossi Shain summarizes this exile use of the symbolic as follows: “By preempting labels such as ‘government-in-exile,’ ‘national committee,’ and ‘national council,’ and by continuing the use of familiar sentimental symbols, flags, slogans, songs, cheers, poems, hymns, expressive gestures, and uniforms, exile organizations and their leaders encourage prospective contributors to think of their organization as having national stature and authority.”⁶³ For the London Czechoslovaks, symbolic expressions of nationalistic loyalty, expressions that would most likely be suppressed at home in the Protectorate, were integral parts of life in exile. The Czechoslovak national slogan “Truth Prevails” was omnipresent on all government documents and in exile meetings or ceremonies.⁶⁴ Ceremonies became hugely important for the exiles, and the content, timing, location and context of certain ceremonial events were intricately planned, analyzed, and manipulated. On October 28, 1940, on the occasion of the celebration of Czechoslovak Independence Day, President Beneš placed a single wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown British Soldier in Westminster Abbey, London. As explained by the Assistant to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Beneš’s government, Ivo D. Duchacek: “The political purpose was, of course, to have an appropriate picture published by the London press and so remind the British public of the existence of Czechoslovakia and its representative government in England. A small nation has a

⁶³ Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 59.

⁶⁴ In Czech, “*Pravda vítězí*.”

constant problem of reminding the big powers of its existence and its right to it.”⁶⁵ At other times, the *lack* of a ceremony could be just as symbolically powerful, as on Czechoslovak Independence Day three years later when no public observance of the silver jubilee of Czechoslovak independence occurred in London, “partly because it is recognized that the proper place for celebrations is in Prague.”⁶⁶

Words and the specific formal framing of political arguments were integral to the exile Czechoslovaks’ campaign for recognition. The exiles needed to speak of their nation’s struggle for freedom in the language of legitimacy and international law, making appeals to the restoration of Czechoslovakia “on grounds of historic, legal, and strategic considerations” and their right of rule through “justification, validity, and consent.”⁶⁷ Even something as simple as the persistent use of the word “Czechoslovak” was a conscious decision to project to the Allies an image of national unity and territorial integrity at a time when “Czechoslovakia” was a dismembered nation and a faded idea in the international eye. Exile rhetoric also necessarily had to communicate the appearance of tireless struggle and of solidarity with the violence at home and the Allied liberation efforts on the frontlines, adhering to Max Weber’s warning of “the dangers to monarchies of losing wars and to republics of winning them too easily.”⁶⁸ The Czechoslovak Government accomplished this by not only providing concrete evidence of its value to the war effort, but additionally through the persistent symbolic use of nationalistic

⁶⁵ “In the Funnel of Two Tornados: The Nazi and Soviet Captures of the Heart of Europe: Political Diaries,” p. 2.67, Folder 3, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives. This box in the collection contains Duchacek’s World War II diaries and his unfinished, unpublished memoirs.

⁶⁶ “Czechoslovakia’s Silver Jubilee,” *The Times*, October 28, 1943, p. 3.

⁶⁷ US Department of State, Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference at Quebec, 1944* (Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 56; Bensman, “Max Weber’s Concept of Legitimacy,” 43.

⁶⁸ Bensman, “Max Weber’s Concept of Legitimacy,” 32. For further examination of the exile’s manufactured presentation of united struggle against Nazi tyranny, see Chapter 3.

language in its public communications and in its exchanges with Allied politicians and Allied citizens.

Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk's humor, sociability, and clever command of the English and Russian languages made him a skilled manipulator of diplomatic rhetoric aimed at achieving improved standing for his exile government. A conversation of his with Franklin Roosevelt in October of 1942 presents a comprehensive example of the exile use of logic, reason, and rhetoric, offering an engaging insight into the personality and demeanor of Czechoslovakia's First Son.⁶⁹ As Masaryk related to his exile colleague Josef Korbel:

On one of his frequent visits to the United States, [Masaryk] talked at length with Roosevelt about the war and world politics. Czechoslovakia was not mentioned. At the end of the audience, as Masaryk was about to leave, the President asked him, 'Jan, is there anything I can do for you?' Masaryk answered, 'Yes, Mr. President. We have in England about one thousand pilots. Many of them fly over Germany on bombing missions. Some of them never return. They are shot down by enemy fire and they are killed. They are dead – not provisionally dead.' Roosevelt answered, 'I understand, Jan.' Within a few days the American embassy in London was advised that on October 28, 1942 – Czechoslovakia's Independence Day – President Roosevelt would send a telegram of felicitation that would address Dr. Beneš as 'President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia' and that the Department of State would henceforth not use the term provisional.⁷⁰

Whether or not Jan Masaryk's meeting with President Roosevelt and the receipt of unconditional American recognition went exactly as Masaryk described, Masaryk's story remains a good indicator of the kind of logical, symbolic, rhetorical and diplomatic wrestling the Czechoslovak exiles went through to achieve full recognition for their government-in-exile between 1940 and 1942.

⁶⁹ Jan Masaryk was the son of President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

⁷⁰ Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 167.

As the Czechoslovak Government in London in the first half of World War II fought for what was expected to be increased authority and independence through unconditional diplomatic recognition, its policies and actions became more and more dependent on the actions and whims of the three Allied Powers. Although President Beneš had improved his status inside the Czech and Slovak lands with the bestowment of legitimate authority from above, his power was so intricately tied to the system of Allied diplomacy and negotiation that to ensure his successful return to power after the war Beneš had to maintain uniformly friendly and thriving relations with Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. As these three powers began to drift apart as the war accelerated towards its close, Beneš and the London Czechoslovaks found themselves again and again stuck in the middle, trying to tread a thin diplomatic line.

Researchers of modern refugee movements have observed that “by and large, exile groups that receive governmental assistance receive it in recognition of their use as foreign policy instruments in related international conflict.”⁷¹ As exile organizations allow themselves to become diplomatic bargaining chips in return for increased recognized authority, the flexibility of the exile government to respond to stimuli within the administration or back home becomes severely limited. Tied to the ideology of their sponsor governments and “under the constraint of organizational unity, it becomes almost impossible for exile leadership to respond swiftly to changing circumstance by altering or reformulating policy.”⁷² Winston Churchill in a February 27, 1944 letter to Stalin asserted that when governments-in-exile like the London Poles or Czechoslovaks

⁷¹ Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, “International Factors in the Formation of Refugee Movement,” *International Migration Review* 20 (1986): 166. See also Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 119.

⁷² Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 43.

considered their internal structure or postwar alignment, foreign influence should be kept to a minimum: “I am of the opinion that it is much better that such changes should come about naturally and as result of further [exile] consideration of their interests as a whole.”⁷³ But there is nothing “natural” about a government-in-exile, and all changes or political actions invariably occur under the watchful eye of the established states from which the exiles draw authority.

As evidence of this unbalanced upwards aim towards exile political policy, the governments-in-exile of Czechoslovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Poland under the watch of the Allied Powers at the beginning of 1942 formed a “Central and Eastern European Planning Board.” On this Planning Board the four governments, of whom all but the Czechoslovak were right-wing dictatorships before the war, grasped for British and American support by asserting that they “reaffirm their profound devotion to the democratic principle,” and also reached out ideologically to the Soviet Union by claiming that, in formulating their postwar policy, “special attention goes to the masses of peasant population and to their social and economic standards.”⁷⁴ These four exile governments in 1942 were caught in the middle of three giants and attempted to validate and maintain their status by continuing to appeal to and support each of the three Allied Powers. No doubt some of these democratic and socialist affirmations were driven by public opinion back in the occupied home states, but from right-leaning exile governments, like those of Yugoslavia, Greece, and Poland, such pronouncements seem to be predominantly motivated by pragmatic diplomatic necessity.

⁷³ USSR Foreign Ministry, *Correspondence*, 205. Churchill’s letter was in response to the Soviet Union’s insistence on political and personal changes in the exile Polish government, and to Stalin’s support of a contingent of political exiles from Lublin, Poland over the more conservative London Poles.

⁷⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Relations 1941-1942* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1942), 270.

In the summer and fall of 1943, President Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government truly began to feel this wedge. Beneš wished to solidify his postwar standing by completing treaties of military cooperation and postwar friendship with the three Allied Powers, but Allied hesitancy, distrust and a desire to postpone postwar agreements put the London Czechoslovaks in an awkward position. The Soviet Union expressed interest in completing a treaty of mutual assistance and postwar cooperation, and Beneš, with memories of British and French abandonment at Munich still searing, was keen on solidifying Soviet relations for future protection against German or other foreign subjugation. The British and Americans, however, demanded that Czechoslovakia wait until “the general framework of European security” could be established by the three Allied Powers. Staking his authority to the Allied governments, Beneš was forced to appease all three nations by forming policy and taking diplomatic steps that, at times, had the Allied Powers more in mind than his colleagues in London or his compatriots at home. Consequently Beneš found himself thoroughly isolated at points during the war, a common occurrence for a homeless politician.⁷⁵ As an example of such, when Beneš finally did travel to Moscow in December of 1943 to complete a Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty, he was thoroughly and fully alone: no other prominent members of the London Czechoslovak Government came with him and no consultation of Czechs inside occupied territory had occurred. Beneš’s politics and policies during the war lingered somewhere between Anglo-American republicanism and Soviet socialism: agreeing with neither and completely pleasing none.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Soviet Treaty with Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, November 30, 1943, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 201-2; “President Benesh and Moscow,” London Diary notes, 1943, Box 1, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

Incidentally, Beneš's voyage to Moscow to meet with Stalin, Molotov and members of the Soviet government at the end of November 1943 was directed through Tehran, Iran. Without Beneš's knowledge or consent, his journey and the security precautions around it were used as a decoy for the transportation of Roosevelt and Churchill to the Tehran Conference of November 28 – December 1.⁷⁷ President Beneš was utilized as a tool, a pawn and a bargaining chip, analogous to the Allies' cotemporaneous use of the Czechoslovak Government and other governments-in-exile. During World War II the London Czechoslovaks resided in the lonely vacuum between national loyalty and international recognition, between Eastern Allies and Western Allies, between ideology and necessity, between diplomatic rhetoric and internal political reality.

⁷⁷ Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, 143; and, Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš*, 259-260.

Chapter Three

Building National Loyalty: The View from Below

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With the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk and the German capture of France in the summer of 1940, World War II in Western Europe became for the next four years a contest of aerial bombardment and naval blockade. As the British carefully prevented seaborne supplies from entering Fortress Europe and fueling the Axis war effort, they induced a level of hardship and material disadvantage on not only Germany and Italy, but on all occupied European nations. The Czech and Slovak lands in the heart of the continent would feel the pressure of an ever tightening blockade for the entirety of the war. In December of 1940, the United States suggested to Great Britain a possible export of relief supplies into blockaded areas. Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk answered these American proposals in a December 7 radio broadcast from London: “The Czecho-Slovak nation is determined to withstand without complaint the combined effect of German oppression and the British blockade, which result in a serious food shortage in our country. From our point of view it is much better to get along without material necessities, such as food and clothing, than that our souls should be destroyed.”<sup>1</sup>

Separated from their occupied home nation by hundreds of miles and the German military, Jan Masaryk and the Czechoslovak exiles in London decided for their voiceless

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<sup>1</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Relations 1941-1942* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1942), 507.

compatriots in 1940 to back an Allied policy that would directly result in reduced food supplies inside Czech and Slovak lands. While many in the occupied territory might have agreed with this policy, what gave President Beneš and his government the authority to speak for a nation of which they were no longer part? What gave Jan Masaryk the right to prevent Allied supplies from entering his enslaved homeland while he ate English food and wore English clothes in his London residence? As Allied governments bestowed increased authority on the London Czechoslovaks, did the citizens at home conjointly pledge their national loyalty to President Beneš and the policies of his government-in-exile? Although they claimed to share the uniform Czechoslovak national “point of view,” for whom did the London exiles truly speak?<sup>2</sup>

In the months following the Munich Agreement, Edvard Beneš enjoyed little loyalty and respect among his compatriots inside the dismembered Czechoslovak state. “How was it possible that any people could allow itself to be led for twenty years by such a *Sauhund* – such an international, democratic *Sauhund* – as Beneš?” was a common sentiment expressed inside Czechoslovakia.<sup>3</sup> Munich not only damaged President Beneš’s reputation at home, but also profoundly affected the national psyche and public opinion towards the political system Beneš represented, as reported by George Kennan from the American Embassy in Prague in December 1938: “Every feature of liberalism and democracy, in particular, was hopelessly and irretrievably discredited.”<sup>4</sup> Still, even

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<sup>2</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, 507.

<sup>3</sup> George Kennan, *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 7. *Sauhund* is a German expression of contempt, translating as “bastard,” “dirty dog,” or “swine.” *Langenscheidt’s Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English and German Languages*, ed. Otto Springer (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1975), s.vv. “Sauhund,” “Schweinehund.”

<sup>4</sup> Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 7. Czechoslovakia was one of the last remaining liberal democracies in Europe by 1938, and the Munich Agreement for many citizens represented the failure of not

as German troops poured into Prague in March 1939, the Czechs maintained a level of positive, if subdued, national and political pride, albeit a patriotism noticeably divorced from the Beneš conception of Czechoslovakia: “Spiritually and mentally the Czechs are wholly unconquered.”<sup>5</sup> While occupied half a year before war began in Europe and defeated without a shot being fired in defense, Czechs in the occupied territory did not wholly acquiesce to German rule and participated in a subdued “passive resistance” from the onset of the occupation. This resistance was decentralized and divorced from Czechoslovak leaders abroad, and relied on such acts as “mass deposits of small bouquets of flowers on certain monuments,” the playing of patriotic Czech music, and public displays of national colors.<sup>6</sup> A *Times* reporter observed that “on one occasion a German band was advertised to give a performance in the chief square of the capital, which was crowded half an hour before the advertised time for the concert, but empty when the concert started.”<sup>7</sup>

In general, though, open internal Czechoslovak resistance during the war was minimal compared to that of other occupied nations. Part of the cause for reduced Czech resistance originated from the German organizational structure of Czech society, a system that was in place before war in Europe even broke out. The Germans depended on Czech agricultural and industrial production from factories like the Škoda armaments plant, and thus were very careful with their treatment of Czech labor. In the early months of occupation the Germans successfully “won over” the Czech working class, which

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only the Versailles system of international diplomacy, but also the liberal democratic form of governance that the 1919 peace treaty stood for.

<sup>5</sup> “Inside Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, June 10, 1941, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 158-9.

<sup>7</sup> “Inside Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, June 10, 1941, p. 5. The internal situation of the newly independent Slovak State was different than that of the Czech Protectorate, and will be addressed later in Chapter 3, pages 89-97.

typically comprised the backbone of World War II European resistance movements, by infiltrating and destroying the Czech Labor Party and Czech labor unions and by offering workers favorable work pay and rewards.<sup>8</sup> As described in a 1941 London report on the situation inside Czechoslovakia: “At home there are two camps: workers and intellectuals. As the workers are earning plenty of money and have many other benefits, they do not share the sentiments of the intellectuals who are more profoundly convinced of the need for fighting against the Germans.”<sup>9</sup>

Still, not all workers were satisfied with quiet compliance with German rule, and as war broke out in Europe and Beneš’s exile government began coalescing abroad, more and more Czechs from all economic classes joined underground organizations in the Protectorate. These resistance movements were highly disorganized at first and looked in very different directions for unity and guidance: “There is not one but a thousand underground organizations in Czechoslovakia today. And though the aim of each of these organizations is to drive out the Germans, there are probably a thousand views of how to do it and what to put in its place when Czechoslovakia is free again.”<sup>10</sup> The first four major resistance groups to form in the summer of 1939 spanned the entirety of the right-left political spectrum. Towards the right and led by former Czechoslovak military officers was “Nation’s Defense” (*Obrana národa* or ON). “Political Center” (PÚ) was comprised of close Beneš associates remaining in the Protectorate who were politically moderate, while “Committee of the Petition ‘We Remain Faithful’” (PVVZ) was made

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<sup>8</sup> Jiří Hronek, *Volcano Under Hitler: The Underground War in Czechoslovakia* (London: The Czechoslovak Independent, 1941), 78. See also: Reports: 1939-1941, p. 13, Folder 3, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.; Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>9</sup> Reports: 1944, p. 5, Folder 7, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Shiela Grant Duff, *A German Protectorate: The Czechs Under Nazi Rule* (London: Macmillian & Co., 1942), 275.



up of leftist Social Democratic intellectuals and labor unionists. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), dismantled and forced underground in fall of 1938 after the Munich Agreement, comprised the final major resistance organization. The first few months of disordered Czech resistance to German occupation were predominantly overseen by these four groups.<sup>11</sup>

By the winter of 1939-1940, though, the internal situation in the Czech lands had become even more jumbled with increased German persecution and suppression of all four major Czech resistance movements. The Communist resistance had, in addition, become internally confused and ineffective, as it severed itself from other underground groups in September 1939 after the signing of the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact and the insistence of Moscow that the KSČ reduce all anti-German propaganda and sabotage. Disunity and confusion in the underground resistance, combined with the establishment of the Czechoslovak National Committee abroad at the end of 1939, meant that dissenters in the Protectorate more and more looked toward exiled Czechoslovak politicians for guidance and direction. It was at this moment that Edvard Beneš, his name still soiled from the Munich disaster, began repairing his reputation with citizens at home, resistance members and nonmembers alike.<sup>12</sup>

Exile organizations by their very nature are highly susceptible to charges of national disloyalty and must strive persistently to prove to the citizens they left behind that their exit was a necessary one for preservation of the “national voice.” As power for an exile government is a dual process of securing international recognition abroad and building national loyalty at home, Beneš was particularly pressed during the war to

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<sup>11</sup> Vojtěch Mastný, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 145.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

demonstrate both his blamelessness in the Munich Agreement and the legal continuity of his presidency, not only to the Allied Powers but also to his citizens in occupied Czechoslovakia.<sup>13</sup> These attempts at loyalty rebuilding were slow going for Beneš and his London allies in the early years of the war and, in many ways, remained only partially completed by the time of liberation.

In 1939, the wounds of Munich were still quite fresh. The Czech resistance group *Obrana národa* (ON), for example, was formed in the spring of 1939 as a “total rejection by the nation of the acceptance of the dismemberment of the country by Beneš’s government.”<sup>14</sup> This denunciation of Beneš’s leadership came surprisingly from the resistance organization most closely allied with the London Czechoslovak government, the group that would later act as the first major contact between Beneš and the Czech underground.<sup>15</sup> Other resistance groups and Czechoslovak citizens were even less forgiving of Beneš’s actions. George Kennan, observing Czechoslovak public opinion from the American consulate in Prague, claimed that: “The Czech Committee in London, headed by Dr. Beneš, is not viewed with much seriousness in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The publicity given to Beneš and Jan Masaryk adversely affects the Czech people and, moreover, Beneš has never recovered his popularity with his own people.”<sup>16</sup> This specific eyewitness to the internal Czech distrust of President Beneš may have been overly biased against the London exile government, as even when Beneš’s reputation was

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<sup>13</sup> Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 163.

<sup>14</sup> Jaroslav Kašpar-Pátý, “Obrana Národa as the Organizer of Anti-Nazi Resistance During 1939-1945,” in *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part 2*, ed. Lewis M. White (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 166. See also: George Kennan, *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 239.

clearly on the rebound Kennan claimed that only “German clumsiness has given to Beneš’s name a superficial boulevard popularity which his personality on its own merits was never able to command.”<sup>17</sup> Still, the fact that these deep seeded Czech criticisms were palpable at a time when any government might be preferable to German domination points to the high level of contention Beneš’s personage generated.<sup>18</sup>

Beneš began counteracting these criticisms with his first major contact with the Czech resistance in June 1939, when one of the leading members of the underground organization ON, General Sergej Ingr, left Moravia to join the group of exiles taking shape in London. When Beneš formed his exile government Ingr became the Minister of National Defense, constituting a major conduit between London and occupied territory and establishing the foundation of the respected Czechoslovak intelligence center. The influence of the London exiles in the internal resistance continued to expand into 1940, particularly after effective German suppression of the Czech underground in the winter of 1939-1940 scattered the domestic leadership. In early 1940, the depleted forces of the three major noncommunist Czech resistance organizations (ON, PÚ, and PVVZ) combined to form a single united entity, the “Central Leadership of Home Resistance” (ÚVOD), to coordinate future underground activities. By the fall of 1940 all major noncommunist resistance leaders had pledged allegiance to ÚVOD, with the communist resistance later joining after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.<sup>19</sup> ÚVOD would become, through increased contact with London, “the principle clandestine

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<sup>17</sup> Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 224. Kennan frequently in his writings disapproved of Beneš and his London group, referring to the political exiles on occasion as “irresponsible Czechs.” See Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 239.

<sup>18</sup> Jiří Doležal and Jan Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight: Documents of the Resistance Movement of the Czechoslovak People 1938-1945* (Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1964), 34.

<sup>19</sup> For continued discussion of the role of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the resistance, see Chapter 3, pages 84-5.

intermediary between Beneš and the Protectorate” and the foundation for the government-in-exile’s influence over internal developments in occupied territory.<sup>20</sup>

With increased international recognition for President Beneš abroad in 1940 and 1941 and the opening of communication channels into occupied territory, the London Czechoslovaks soon began to be seen as a necessary asset for the resistance movement, acting as the public face of an oppressed and silenced people:

For the great majority of these [resistance] organizations – the Communists still excepted – the Czechoslovak Government in London represents the guarantee of Allied support and the public symbol of this secret, organized opposition at home. It is the servant, and should never be regarded as the master, of fearless men and women in Czechoslovakia on whom, in the last resort, the expulsion of the Nazis depends. On the other hand, the Czechoslovakia Government performs a great and essential service, and in time of war and at the height of repression at home it is an absolute necessity.<sup>21</sup>

For Czechs in occupied territory there was still a clear disconnection between the freedom fighters at home and their mouthpiece abroad in London, but Beneš’s important leadership role in the resistance was more and more recognized by Czechs of anti-Nazi sympathies in the Protectorate. Just as Beneš would use his connections with the Czech underground as justification for receipt of international recognition, various resistance groups would soon use their connections with London to justify their influence inside the Protectorate: “An underground organization which had at its disposal a radio transmitter, which meant connection with London, was considered to be a representative of the resistance.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Duff, *German Protectorate*, 275.

<sup>22</sup> Radomír Luža, “Home Resistance: View from the Front Line Trenches,” in *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part 3*, ed. Lewis M. White (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 109.

By 1941 Beneš would be able to convince Allied press sources that, for Czechs at home, his Government in London “alone retains their respect and commands their allegiance.”<sup>23</sup> But while public opinion of President Beneš had improved in the eyes of citizens on the home front, Beneš’s own opinion of the home front itself was ambiguous. Throughout the war Beneš would again and again find himself stuck between conflicting attempts to secure international recognition and to build national loyalty. Historian Vojtěch Mastný, son of an influential Czechoslovak politician during the war, argued:

Although Beneš asserted that in the liberation movement the suffering nation must play the decisive political role, in reality he regarded the domestic front as secondary in importance. As in World War I, Beneš expected that diplomacy alone, strengthened by the military exploits of Czechoslovak troops on the Allied side, would bring freedom... Consequently, Beneš tried to subordinate the resistance movement in the Protectorate to his personal authority and to the requirements of his diplomacy.<sup>24</sup>

While President Beneš did desire to ensure his positive reputation at home, throughout the war the necessity to project to the Allies an image of national unity sometimes overshadowed the need to generate a truly united anti-Nazi front. As the Allied Powers used the Czechoslovak Government in London as a pawn in their own power struggles (as described in Chapter 2), so the London Czechoslovaks used the resistance movement and internal public opinion as an instrument in their struggle for recognition and return to power.

Although President Beneš publicly claimed that “there is no such thing as one revolution at home and another abroad... there is only one united and common movement for liberation,” the actions and motivations of Czechoslovaks in the London government contrasted wildly from time to time with those of Czechoslovaks in the

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<sup>23</sup> “Murder in Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, October 1, 1941, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 147.

internal resistance movement.<sup>25</sup> At three particularly key moments during the war, Beneš forcefully and artificially inserted his presence into the development of the home resistance movement in an attempt to improve his and his nation's international standing. With his role in the suppression of the Hácha Government in Prague in 1941, the assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, and the Slovak Uprising in 1944, President Beneš took steps to improve the long-term status of his government and its specific conception of postwar Czechoslovakia through appeals for increased Allied recognition. But these international improvements came at the expense of the present well-being of Czechs and Slovaks in occupied territory and had detrimental results for the future of underground resistance activity. While these three events might have been triumphs for Beneš on the international stage and did help ensure the reconstitution of an independent Czechoslovak state after the war, their immediate repercussions would have damaging effects on the internal reputation of the London government and on the ease of postwar reconstruction. They provide illuminating examples of the London Czechoslovaks' use of their domestic influence not necessarily to build home loyalty, but to manipulate international recognition: a practice common and unavoidable for many governments-in-exile.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Arrest of Prime Minister Alois Eliáš and the Decline of the Hácha Regime**

In the early years of the war, President Beneš had difficulty claiming unconditional authority over Czechoslovakia when a legally Czech-elected government

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<sup>25</sup> "Dr. Beneš's Message to the State Council, February 3, 1944," Folder 15, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 61.

still sat in power. Though no Allied leader would deny the feeble status of the German-controlled Czech Protectorate Government nor bestow on it any degree of official recognition, its president, Emil Hácha, had been presiding over the nation since November 1938, four months before the complete German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, and many believed his presence was necessary at least to minimize Nazi police action and violence in the occupied territory. Many British and American politicians in 1940 thought the Hácha government was needed to “preserve at least a representative head through which Czech grievances can be voiced,” and to “defend the conception of the Czech people as a nation rather than as a mere relic.”<sup>27</sup> Although the Czech populace understood that President Hácha was forcefully directed by his German overseers, there was still a good degree of respect for the ageing statesman.<sup>28</sup> For the Allies, loyalty shifts and developments inside occupied territory were hard to read, and Allied leaders preferred not to disrupt the balance of power that seemed to be keeping violence and unrest at a minimum.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in May 1939 two months after the German invasion Hácha, at the insistence of Nazi authorities, collapsed all political parties into a united single-party system called the “National Community,” and over ninety-eight percent of the eligible male population registered with this National Solidarity program of political concentration. This apparently overwhelming support for Hácha’s puppet regime was likely assisted by voter fraud, but the large numbers of Czech supporters were also interpreted by some observers abroad as a tremendous showing of national Czech unity in the face of occupation.<sup>30</sup> The German occupiers were, in fact, nervous of

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<sup>27</sup> Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 237.

<sup>28</sup> Reports: 1944, p. 3, Folder 7, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Kennan, *From Prague After Munich*, 236.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

this and Karl Hermann Frank, Assistant to the Reichsprotektor, became mildly alarmed that the “Czechs were closely uniting and concentrating.”<sup>31</sup> President Hácha, however powerless in the hands of German Protectorate authorities, still remained an important symbol of Czech independence and national unity.

The Allied Powers were also reluctant to ignore the Hácha regime in favor of granting full recognition to the Czechoslovaks in London because of the importance of members in the “collaborationist” government to the underground resistance movement. Czechoslovak General Alois Eliáš became Prime Minister of the Czech Protectorate Government in April 1939 and brought to the position his many connections with the Czech resistance group ON. Eliáš placed a large number of ON members and former army officers into “various government positions where they could render valuable services to *Obrana národa*,” and was himself a secret member of the Czech underground.<sup>32</sup> From 1939-1941, the “Provisional” Czechoslovak Government in London, the Czech Resistance Movement, and the Czech Protectorate Government comprised a vital triangle of communication between the Allied Powers and occupied territory that the Allies did not want to compromise.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the question of which Czechoslovak leader best represented the will of the Czech and Slovak people was impossible to answer in the Allies’ eyes in these first three years of the war. While few would argue that Hácha was truly an effective leader while held hostage by German overseers, Hácha did make persuasive arguments

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<sup>31</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Kašpar-Pátý, “Obrana Národa,” in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, 31. Most other members of the Czech Protectorate government were more or less maligned by resistance leaders and as a whole the resistance did not approve of the Nazi collaborationism of the puppet administration. With Alois Eliáš and a few other Hácha associates, though, Czech resistance leaders formed a productive clandestine relationship that Allied leaders did not want to disrupt.

<sup>33</sup> See: Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 166; Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 115.



as to why Beneš, separated by hundreds of miles, was too isolated from the Czech people to have their best interests in mind: “Mr. Beneš... does not see, as I do, the tears of mothers and wives who address their desperate pleas to me because their sons and husbands fell into disaster having being seduced by deceptive radio broadcasts. He is in a position to permit himself illusions, to build castles in the air, and to paint alluring pictures of the future.”<sup>34</sup> Clearly removed from the plight of Czech and Slovak citizens – one by physical distance and one by German domination – President Beneš and President Hácha both made separate substantive arguments for their personal presidential legitimacy. And although the Allied nations would never bestow official recognition on a Hácha government that was undoubtedly controlled by Germany, the presence of a strategically useful Czech puppet government in Prague was one of several reasons Great Britain and the United States gave for withholding unconditional recognition from Beneš and the London exiles.<sup>35</sup>

On June 22, 1941 the Soviet Union entered World War II on the Allied side and President Beneš pounced on the opportunity to increase his international standing and lose the “provisional” stipulation attached to his London government by courting Soviet recognition.<sup>36</sup> To receive unconditional recognition, though, Beneš had to distance himself from the Hácha Government in Prague in an attempt to highlight his status as the lone recognized leader at home and to remove any tinge of collaborationism from his government in the eyes of the virulently antifascist Soviet Communists.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Beneš forced ahead the dissolution of the Hácha Government regardless of the effect this

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<sup>34</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 198.

<sup>35</sup> See also Chapter 2, pages 46-7.

<sup>36</sup> This recognition courtship is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, pages 48-53.

<sup>37</sup> John O. Crane and Sylvia Crane, *Czechoslovakia: Anvil of the Cold War* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 211.

might have on the internal situation in the Protectorate or the future ease of collaboration with the Czech underground resistance. On June 24, two days after Soviet entry into the war, Beneš sent a letter to President Hácha and Prime Minister Eliáš asking for them to “resign immediately and to refrain from any form of collaboration.”<sup>38</sup> He gave the following reasoning for his request: “For the honor of the nation and its post-war unity, in the interest of avoiding bitter conflicts between ourselves immediately after the war and especially of not giving the Communists a pretext to take over power on the basis of justified reproach that we helped Hitler, you must re-examine your policy and take decisive steps.”<sup>39</sup> While his reasons for dissolving ties to the collaborationist government appear logical, there is no escaping the observation that Beneš’s actions seem partially motivated by a self-serving desire to preserve his own present and future authority regardless of how this might affect the internal situation of his country. Beneš chose this exact moment to demand the Hácha Government’s surrender so he could eliminate any lingering doubt of his unconditional authority and ensure unqualified support from the USSR and, in turn, Great Britain. Cutting ties with the collaborators was less about combating communist criticism in the future than securing Soviet recognition in the present.<sup>40</sup>

Hácha and Eliáš ignored President Beneš’s request to resign immediately. The two men made preparations for resignation if the domestic or international situation changed, or “in the event of any future German provocative action,” but claimed that to dissolve the Czech administration in the Protectorate at present would be detrimental to

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<sup>38</sup> Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 352.

<sup>39</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 123.

the welfare of Czechs in occupied territory.<sup>41</sup> Beneš responded to this clear indication of his weak authority amongst Czech leaders in the Protectorate by making aggressive threats towards Hácha and Eliáš, stating that if they did not resign the London government “would be compelled to begin propaganda against you, make attacks against the government, the president, the Protectorate, and this would be fatal.”<sup>42</sup> On September 27, 1941 President Beneš finally got his wish, though not in the manner he requested. On this date Reinhard Heydrich, second in command of the Nazi SS and notorious for his violent fanaticism, became the Reichsprotektor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in charge of overseeing the territory and its puppet Czech administration. On October 1 Heydrich had Protectorate Prime Minister Eliáš arrested for collaborating with the Czech underground. With this important link to the resistance movement destroyed, “Beneš was no longer inhibited from denouncing the remaining officials of the Hácha administration as traitors,” and solidified his position as sole presidential authority.<sup>43</sup>

While not conclusively proven, there is considerable evidence of President Beneš and the London government’s direct role in the arrest and subsequent execution of Alois Eliáš. Nazi authorities had known of Prime Minister Eliáš’s connections with the underground for some time, but only moved to arrest him with the ascendancy of Reinhard Heydrich and the discovery of foreign letters sent to Eliáš in what appeared to be resistance plain-language code.<sup>44</sup> According to the British intelligence and espionage

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<sup>41</sup> Mamatey and Luža, eds., *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*, 352.

<sup>42</sup> Libuše Otáhalová and Milada Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939-1943* (Prague: Academia, 1966), 614.

<sup>43</sup> Vojtěch Mastný, “The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile During World War II,” Folder 4, Box 25, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Táborský, *President Edvard Beneš: Between East and West* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 1981), 310.

agent Sir William Stephenson, codename INTREPID, these letters were in fact forged by agents of the Czechoslovak Government in London and Great Britain in an attempt to frame the “collaborationist” Eliáš.<sup>45</sup> INTREPID was the senior representative of British intelligence for the entire western hemisphere during World War II, and stated that through his “special operations branch” Beneš’s government conspired to remove Eliáš from power:

Czech exiles in London, in daily touch with Czech intelligence circuits, such as Sparta I and Sparta II, and the Czech secret army, ÚVOD, the Central Committee for Internal Resistance, feared that resistance to the Nazis was being undermined by the collaborators. When Heydrich issued a public announcement that he had taken control, the secret-army chiefs had already decided to arrange the death of a prominent collaborator, a Czech code-named JUDAS... JUDAS’s real name was Alois Eliáš; the General was Prime Minister of the puppet government in Prague. It is doubtful if more than three men involved in his overthrow through the JUDAS letters were aware of his identity.<sup>46</sup>

Did Beneš revert to coercive means to remove the Prime Minister of the Czech Protectorate Government, a man posthumously declared “a rare hero among pragmatists” and given a full state funeral in 2006, because the Hácha regime would not step down on its own accord?<sup>47</sup> Hácha and Eliáš as Nazi collaborators undoubtedly had no future as leaders in a liberated Czechoslovakia, but by aggressively seeking the dissolution of the collaborationist government, Beneš destroyed an important asset for the Czech resistance and for the flow of information between the Allies and the home front. The only reason Beneš needed to destroy what remaining authority the Hácha regime had left at that precise moment in 1941 was so Beneš could secure unconditional recognition for his

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<sup>45</sup> Sir William Stephenson, a longtime friend of author Ian Fleming, is believed by many to be the chief real-life inspiration for Fleming’s James Bond.

<sup>46</sup> William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 351-352. See also: H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Quiet Canadian: The Secret Service Story of Sir William Stephenson* (London: Constable and Company, 1962), 136-137.

<sup>47</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 191.

government and for his unqualified role as Czechoslovak leader. The repercussion of a collapsed Czech Protectorate administration on life in occupied territory was not a primary concern for President Beneš. Indeed, after Reinhard Heydrich's rise to power and the suppression of any resistance elements in the Hácha government, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was subjected to months of amplified German brutality, a brutality the weakened Czech puppet government could do little to dampen.<sup>48</sup> But the Beneš government in London could in turn capitalize on this amplified brutality and use it as a demonstration of Czechoslovak struggle and solidarity, as seen in a 1941 London report: "Even the premier of the Protectorate puppet Government has been condemned to death. A proof that everyone is in the struggle against the Germans."<sup>49</sup>

### **The Assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich**

It is common for an exile government to exaggerate or fabricate stories of the "apparent collaboration of the organization with the underground forces at home" to provide evidence of progress and to legitimize itself in national and international eyes.<sup>50</sup> This tendency to use manipulated examples of resistance bravery and sacrifice to amplify the importance of the exiles on the home front permeated throughout Beneš's government during the war. In fact, the most visible moments of Czechoslovak resistance activity during the war were by and large manufactured by the London government. The crowing achievement of the Czech resistance, the assassination of

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<sup>48</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 198.

<sup>49</sup> Reports: 1939-1941, p. 19, Folder 3, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives. Hácha remained the puppet Protectorate president until the end of the war. He was arrested after the liberation of Prague but died a month later due to his failing health, never standing trial as a collaborator.

<sup>50</sup> Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 61.

Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942, was in actuality planned by Beneš and his associates in London and forced upon the underground leaders mostly against their will. The end result of this assassination may have been a success for President Beneš and for the future reestablishment of the Czechoslovak state, but it was a disaster for Czech nationalists in the Protectorate, as it unleashed a terrifying backlash of Nazi violence against the Czech people and prevented any future resistance activity in Bohemia until the closing months of the war.<sup>51</sup>

The entry of the Soviet Union into World War II in 1941 brought the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) back into the struggle against the German occupation. In the summer of 1941 the KSČ was severely weakened after suffering through the previous two years of Nazi suppression campaigns and, as a result of the Soviet-German Non-aggression Pact, through its own forced anti-Allied rhetoric: “Its awkward propaganda against the ‘imperialist’ war did not appeal to anyone but party diehards, and the leaders were keenly aware of their isolation from the masses.”<sup>52</sup> To fight this, the communists quickly reconciled themselves with the noncommunist resistance (ÚVOD), and a flurry of increased partisan activity rippled through the Protectorate that summer.<sup>53</sup> Reinhard Heydrich was brought in at the end of September 1941 partially as a means to stomp out this increased resistance activity, and in this role the Reichsprotektor was highly successful. In a flurry of arrests and executions in the fall of 1941 and leading into 1942, the Czech underground was thoroughly devastated and was forced to cut back on its subversive activities. The Communist Party, though, was hit relatively less hard by Heydrich’s anti-resistance campaign during this time than was the ÚVOD, so by the

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<sup>51</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 169.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 51.

spring of 1942 the KSČ had regained the popular support among Czechs that it sorely lacked less than a year before. As a telegram sent from the noncommunist resistance to the Czechoslovak Government in London stated apprehensively: “The intensive, almost public activities of the Communists convince the masses that they are the only ones who are not afraid of sacrifices or work. They impress the people and have their support.”<sup>54</sup>

By the fall of 1941, the Czechoslovak Exile Government through its intelligence center in London had set in motion plans for the assassination of a high ranking leader in the Protectorate. The reasoning behind this operation is not entirely clear, but most historians claim that “Beneš’s desire to demonstrate the strength of the Czech resistance appears to have been the most important motivation” in the plot.<sup>55</sup> Beyond this justification and more specifically, though, Beneš was looking to prove not only the strength and sacrifice of the Czech underground, but demonstrate its dependency on the London Czechoslovaks for guidance and direction. The suppression of Czech resistance in the fall of 1941, the conditional and qualified recognition still bestowed on Beneš by Great Britain and the United States, and the ascendancy of the Communist Party in the Czech underground not subservient to London, made President Beneš anxious to give the Allies a strong example of Czechoslovak solidarity and union.<sup>56</sup> As a result, Beneš’s loyal advisor, Colonel František Moravec, arranged for the landing of Czechoslovak paratroopers from Great Britain in occupied territory to rendezvous with resistance members and organize a high profile assassination. Ivo D. Duchacek, Assistant to the

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<sup>54</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 69.

<sup>55</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 206. See also Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 181; Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Neither Great Britain nor the United States at this time would officially repudiate the Munich Agreement, guarantee postwar Czechoslovak boundaries, or recognize Beneš’s continuity of rule. The United States in particular still recognized only a “Provisional” Czecho-Slovak Government in London.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Beneš's government, observed these developments in his diary:

While at that time, except for Beneš and Moravec and his espionage group nobody knew the real truth (that it was not a work of Czech resistance but that the assailants were dispatched from London), the exiles' need for a spectacular report about the Czech fighting resistance is documented in several [of my] entries before and after June. Communists, in particular, pressed for direct appeals for more resistance... The exile government pressed the British RAF to bring the war to the otherwise tranquil Czech territory.<sup>57</sup>

In the beginning of May 1942, as it had become clear that the London government intended for Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich to be the target of assassination, many in the Czech resistance became worried about the repercussions of such a plan and did not want the Czechoslovak parachutists to carry out the operation. Two prominent resistance leaders on May 9 sent an urgent message to London, pleading for cancellation of the predominantly symbolic rather than strategic assassination:

Such an assassination would be of the least value for the Allies while it would have unforeseeable consequences for our nation. Not only would it endanger our hostages and political prisoners with horrible reprisals, but it would cost thousands of other lives... and expose the nation to unprecedented suppression. At the same time it would sweep away the last remains of [our] organization, thus preventing any further action here which would be of use to the Allies. We beg you therefore to see that the attack is not carried out. Delay is dangerous. Give the order immediately.<sup>58</sup>

Instead of heeding to the recommendations of Czech leaders on the ground in the Protectorate, though, the London Czechoslovak Government pushed forward with the risky and arguably minimally important assassination attempt. Colonel František Moravec sent a reply message to the resistance movement on May 12, 1942, exclaiming, "let them execute the orders given to them," while Beneš followed up with a May 15

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<sup>57</sup> London Diary Notes: 1941, Folder 8, Box 1, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Zdenek Kordina, "General Ingr and the Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich," in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, ed. Lewis M. White, 151. See also Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 209.



message advocating violent resistance as a means to guarantee the future of the country and to “save the nation internationally.”<sup>59</sup> Showing its disregard for internal opinion and its over-reliance on impressing the Allied Powers, the London Czechoslovak Government pushed forward with the Heydrich assassination, and on May 27 the *SS-Obergruppenführer* considered by Hitler as a probable successor was attacked on a Prague street, dying several days later from his wounds: the only high ranking Nazi official to be successfully assassinated by the Allies during World War II.<sup>60</sup>

As members of the Czech resistance feared and as the London Czechoslovaks ignored or were ambivalent to, Reinhard Heydrich’s assassination had disastrous effects on the situation for Czechs inside the Protectorate, unleashing a dramatic spree of Nazi suppression, terror, and retribution killings. In an attempt to find Heydrich’s assassins, the Germans violently and exhaustively dismantled the organized Czech resistance movement. In a succinct summary of the Heydrich assassination’s disastrous aftermath, Zdenek Kordina, a colonel in the Czechoslovak exile army in Great Britain, relates: “I asked General Ingr how such an experienced intelligence officer as Col. František Moravec could plan an attack which led to the almost complete destruction of the intelligence network, severed radio links with London, cost the lives of nine parachutists... and made airborne operations extremely difficult.”<sup>61</sup> In addition to the dismantling of the Czech underground, a major strategic setback for the Allies, the *Heydrichiáda*, as the retributive terror came to be known, killed thousands of innocent

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<sup>59</sup> Kordina, “General Ingr,” in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, 152; Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 209.

<sup>60</sup> Callum MacDonald, *The Killing of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), vii. The assassination plot appeared to have the support of British intelligence, at least in principle, though the Czech clandestine operations branch, “highly sensitive about national sovereignty,” mostly operated under its own initiative. It is unlikely that many British operatives or politicians were aware of the operation, much less involved in its exact details. See MacDonald, *Killing of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich*, 122-3, 158-9.

<sup>61</sup> Kordina, “General Ingr,” in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, 146.

Czechs not associated with the resistance movement. In one of the more infamous examples of Nazi atrocity advertised by the Allies during the war, German soldiers completely destroyed the two Czechoslovak villages of Lidice and Ležáky, killing over five hundred people and literally erasing the villages from the map by bulldozing and burying all evidence of human settlement.<sup>62</sup> Nazi vengeance for Heydrich's assassination not only destroyed the Czech underground "to an extent hardly paralleled elsewhere in Hitler's Europe," but also seared into the Czech psyche a fear and pacification that would permeate for the remainder of the war.<sup>63</sup>

But while the Heydrich assassination was a disaster for Czechs living inside the Protectorate, it was an incredible victory and achievement for President Beneš internationally. The successfully executed military operation allowed Beneš to show the Allied nations an example of Czechoslovak struggle against German oppression: a united home front fighting for liberation and Czechoslovak independence. By directly leading this assassination plot and inserting his operatives from Great Britain into the Protectorate, Beneš was also able to demonstrate clandestinely to the Allies the great authority his government supposedly commanded with citizens back home. The fierceness of the German retribution as exemplified in the Lidice and Ležáky atrocities may have destroyed the spirit of national Czech resistance, but it also ensured receipt of unqualified international recognition for the Czechoslovak Exile Government, as explained by Beneš himself: "What the Germans are doing is horrible, but from the political point of view they gave us one certainty: under no circumstances can doubts be

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<sup>62</sup> These two villages were singled out by the Nazis because relatives of the Heydrich assassins lived there and had ostensibly sheltered the paratroopers during the post-assassination Nazi manhunt.

<sup>63</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 221.

cast any more upon Czechoslovakia's national integrity and her right to independence."<sup>64</sup> President Beneš manipulated internal developments in occupied Czech territory and used the Czech underground resistance directly to advance his own international standing, the standing of his government, and his conception of the Czechoslovak state. But as he looked for legitimation from above through Allied recognition, Beneš widened the gap between his London government and the Czechoslovak people and severed important ties between the exiles and citizens back home. Indeed, as the assassination attempt became unpopular amongst Czechs back home due to the vicious retributive killings it released, Beneš was forced to tactfully distance himself from the operation and not publicly claim complete responsibility.<sup>65</sup> As organized Czech resistance lay in ruins, disconnected from London between 1942 and 1944, the Czechoslovak Exile Government would have little more direct influence on internal developments in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the exiles would more and more have to lean on Allied recognition to maintain their authority.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Slovak National Uprising of 1944**

When the Czechoslovak government-in-exile received full unconditional recognition from all Allied Powers in the fall of 1942, "Czechoslovakia" was still just a concept divorced from political reality. Slovakia, an independent state since March of 1939, had little desire to rejoin a union whose balance of power it felt was unduly

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<sup>64</sup> Otáhalová and Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky*, 274. See also: Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, 126; Kordina, "General Ingr," in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> The degree of Beneš's involvement remains debated, but most historians agree that Beneš was undoubtedly aware of the assassination plan and either directly ordered it or tacitly made sure of its success by refusing to halt the operation once it became clear that Heydrich was the target. See MacDonald, *Killing of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich*, 158-9.

<sup>66</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia's Fight*, 80-1.

weighted towards the Czechs. This separatist Slovak sentiment was not only held by fascist leaders running the country, but permeated the Slovak nation. Although the Slovak fascism practiced by Father Josef Tiso, president of the independent republic, became more and more loathed in Slovakia as the war progressed, a passionate feeling of Slovak nationalism never subsided even in those partisans re-acclimated to the idea of Czechoslovak unity.<sup>67</sup> In the summer of 1944, an uprising aided by the Allies and the Czechoslovak Exile Government broke out in Slovakia against President Tiso's fascist regime. The Slovak National Uprising, as it was dubbed, was a highly muddled and complicated political episode and in the following months came to symbolize something wildly different to the various parties involved: the Czechoslovaks in London, the Allied Powers, and Slovaks themselves. The uprising constituted yet another example of the complex divide between the citizens inside "Czechoslovakia" and the exile government claiming to represent them abroad:

For Western-oriented, pro-Czech elements, the Slovak uprising represents a reaffirmation of the principle of Czechoslovak unity, and a repudiation of Slovak separatism. For Slovak nationalists, who cherish the memory of a separate Slovak state, the 1944 uprising represents a Czech-Soviet conspiracy directed against a government which, in spite of Nazi pressure, attained the maximum degree of Slovak sovereignty permissible under such circumstances.<sup>68</sup>

President Beneš was an adamant opponent of any form of Slovak separatism. He was in the minority of Czechoslovaks to believe firmly and unwaveringly that the Slovak language was simply a dialect of the Czech language and that Slovaks were ethnically

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<sup>67</sup> Korbelt, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 193-5. See also Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, *A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 213.

<sup>68</sup> Vladimír Baumgarten, "An Inquiry into Soviet Military Policy Concerning the Slovak Uprising," in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, ed. Lewis M. White, 211.

identical to Czechs.<sup>69</sup> In a March 1943 broadcast from London, Beneš asserted that Slovakia “as a state separated from the Czech lands... will never be recognized by the victorious Allies.”<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the principal challenge facing the London government during the second half of the war was to ensure the postwar reentry of Slovakia into the Czechoslovak state and the reincorporation of Slovak politicians into a government headed by the Czech Beneš. To accomplish this, President Beneš had to prove to the Allied Powers, on whom postwar reconstruction depended, that he still commanded the loyalty of non-fascist Slovaks and that the majority of Slovaks still held steady Czechoslovak nationalist sympathies. The best way to achieve these goals, it was decided, was through encouragement of an internal Slovak revolt against the autonomous, fascist Slovak state.

If the Exile Government had a tenuous control over the Czech anti-fascist underground, though, it had almost no control over underground developments in Slovakia in the first years of the war. Slovak republican and socialist dissenters opposing the Tiso regime generally looked elsewhere for support and guidance; even the outlawed Communist Party of Slovakia advocated a separatist Slovak philosophy that was detached from Beneš’s unwavering conception of a united, single Czechoslovak state.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the most prominent Slovak leaders still promoting Czechoslovak reunification were estranged from the London government. Štefan Osuský and Milan Hodža, respected exile Slovaks and antagonists of President Beneš, were no longer part

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<sup>69</sup> Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 194.

<sup>70</sup> Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 209.

<sup>71</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 102. The Communist Party of Slovakia, the political organization most persecuted and suppressed by Tiso’s fascist administration and allied with a Soviet Union that had already recognized Beneš’s authority over Czechoslovakia, still held strong separatist feelings and advocated, in a worse case scenario, a federated Czechoslovakia after the war with autonomous Czech and Slovak States.

of the Czechoslovak Government in London by the beginning of 1942. After cutting their ties with the Czech-dominated government-in-exile, the two men continued until the end of the war to argue stridently against Beneš's rightful authority as Czechoslovak sovereign. Hodža even founded a Slovak National Committee in London opposed to both the autonomous fascist Slovakia and the exile Czechoslovak Government, "a sort of Slovak separatism" that called for something in between Tiso's Slovak independence and Beneš's Czechoslovak dependence.<sup>72</sup> As a result of Beneš's quarrels with these leading Slovak exiles, the London government was comprised mainly of Czech politicians and three or four unpopular Slovak leaders: "Beneš's claim for [Slovak] control was made in part through his token Slovaks, who said they spoke on behalf of the nation."<sup>73</sup> Gustáv Husák, prominent leader of the Slovak communist underground and the communist-led faction of the 1944 Uprising, stated that "the Slovaks around Beneš are highly unpopular and no one wants to hear about [them]."<sup>74</sup> Although many Slovaks stood opposed to independent Slovak fascism, unfortunately for the London exiles few of these dissenters believed in Beneš's version of Czechoslovak reunification.

Beginning in the fall of 1943, the Czechoslovaks in London and their contacts in the Slovak resistance began preparations for an anti-fascist uprising. As described by General Sergej Ingr, Beneš's Minister of National Defense: "Contact between the resistance groups in Slovakia who at the outset lacked any central directing body was rather difficult, because the exchange of suggestions and proposals between the Slovak resistance movement and the Czechoslovak Government could take place only by means

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<sup>72</sup> "Correspondence with Lawyers," Folder 6, Box 9, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives. See also: Korběl, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia*, 184-185; Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, 177.

<sup>73</sup> Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 213.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

of wireless, and occasionally with the help of couriers.”<sup>75</sup> In addition to these communication difficulties, the discrepancy of objectives for the uprising and for the postwar relationship between the Czechoslovaks and Slovaks made unitary direction and organization impossible. The two factions could agree on the necessity of “some sort of military action that would destroy the moral, political, and judicial authority of the Slovak Republic,” but not on how specifically these goals should be achieved.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, as the Slovak National Uprising broke out on August 29, 1944, President Beneš and his government loudly asserted their essential leadership role in this insurrection for Czechoslovak liberation and their vital supervision over “all the important phases of the political and military preparations for the revolt.”<sup>77</sup>

The Slovak dissidents and Beneš’s Government were indeed fighting the same revolt against Tiso’s regime, but they were fighting for contradictory reasons. Slovak historian Jaroslav Solc cynically writes: “When the uprising broke out, the government in London acted as if it were ‘its’ uprising, an action inspired and organized by it which made it possible for the Slovaks to redeem their sins and return home like prodigal sons to the Czechoslovak Republic.”<sup>78</sup> Far from the London description of a Czechoslovak nationalist revolt, the Slovaks fought in 1944 in hope of maintaining some form of Slovak autonomy after the war. By 1943 it was clear that the Axis Powers were headed for defeat, and Slovaks in the resistance looked to conjoin Slovakia with the Allied side so not to be treated as a defeated nation after the Axis fell.<sup>79</sup> The Slovak nationalists

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<sup>75</sup> Report to Statní Rada by General Sergej Ingr about the Slovak uprising, Folder 25, Box 25, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 215.

<sup>77</sup> Report to Statní Rada, Folder 25, Box 25, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Jaroslav Solc, *Slovensko v ceskej politike* (Banska Bystrica: M.M. Enterprise, 1993), 204.

<sup>79</sup> Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 222-223.

propelling the Slovak National Uprising forward had consigned themselves to a reunited Czechoslovakia after the war, but they fought in hopes of avoiding the prewar Czech-Slovak power imbalance, as described in a report on the resistance by the London Exile Government: “They are advocates of the Czechoslovak conception, although they are also in favor of administrative decentralization, but they are very strongly opposed to the older politicians.”<sup>80</sup> The Slovak National Uprising was far from the united front for Czechoslovak liberation depicted by the London government, but was a complex alignment of Czechoslovak and Slovak interests held together by a muddled organizational structure, conflicting sources of leadership, and incongruent goals.

With the outbreak of the uprising, a Slovak National Council was formed by leaders of the resistance in the partisan-controlled areas of Slovakia. The founding of this political entity reflected the uprising’s conflicting desires to overthrow Tiso’s Slovak Republic but still maintain some Slovak autonomy. On September 1, 1944, the “democratic and progressive” Slovak National Council declared that it, “being the only body authorized to speak on behalf of the Slovak nation, today takes over the legislation and executive power throughout the entire territory of Slovakia.”<sup>81</sup> Reliant on President Beneš for Allied military support and cognizant of an inescapable Czechoslovak future for the Slovak people, though, the Slovak National Council had to express also its unwavering linkage to the London government while simultaneously attempting to project its independence. Thus the September 1 declaration added: “Our home resistance movement has been directed so far in complete agreement with the Czechoslovak

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<sup>80</sup> General Survey: 1944, p. 32, Folder 8, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

<sup>81</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 98.



resistance movement abroad and it also desires to continue the fight in full unity.”<sup>82</sup> In London, the Czechoslovak exiles were similarly pressed to project externally this image of Czech-Slovak unity. In an October 10 statement to Allied journalists in London, Beneš’s Czechoslovaks in conjunction with Slovak National Council delegates asserted: “The fighting now raging in Slovakia is not a civil war. It is a national struggle of the Slovak people against the Germans under the banner and with the political programme of liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic... it is the whole nation which is waging this war.”<sup>83</sup> While the Allies were keenly aware of the severe political divide separating the Czechs from their Slovak neighbors, with a looming Axis defeat ahead the London exile government was adequately able to project Czechoslovak unity and depict the Slovak National Uprising as a united Czechoslovak national uprising dependent on the authority of President Beneš.

Militarily, the Slovak National Uprising was a complete failure. Politically and militarily impotent, the fascist Tiso regime asked the German army to enter Slovakia and extinguish the rebellion. On October 28, 1944, the anti-Nazi amalgamation of Slovaks and Czechs, mutinous military officers and communist party members, Red Army paratroopers and American military advisors, were forced to surrender their stronghold in central Slovakia and abandon the uprising. But for the London Czechoslovaks, German victory in Slovakia worked as well if not better than a Slovak victory might have. The crushed uprising “brought full-scale military intervention into Slovakia, transformed the area into a war zone, and paved the way for Slovakia to be reincorporated into a

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<sup>82</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 98.

<sup>83</sup> Slovakia: Slovenska narodni rada (Slovak National Council), Folder 26, Box 25, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

resurrected Czechoslovakia.”<sup>84</sup> Just as the Heydrich assassination was more a symbolic than strategic undertaking for Beneš and the Allies, the Slovak National Uprising was from its inception intended for predominantly representative purposes. Through the internal rejection of autonomous Slovak rule, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile secured guaranteed Allied renewal of a united Czechoslovakia. Through the apparent unification of the Slovak resistance around the authority of President Beneš, Beneš assured unconditional Allied backing and a perceived mandate for his postwar authority.<sup>85</sup>

But again, as with the Heydrich assassination and its aftermath, these symbolic actions aimed at affecting Allied opinion and securing international recognition, while doing much for the continuation of a united Czechoslovak state, did little to affect the future cohesiveness of the Czech and Slovak people within that state or the future closeness between Beneš’s government and its citizens. The London exiles manipulated events on the ground for their administration’s advancement, but in reality little of the blood emptied over Slovak soil in September and October of 1944 was shed directly for President Beneš or his London Czechoslovak Government. As the Czechoslovak exiles secured their status in the closing months of the war, the divide between Czechs and Slovak remained still as wide as ever. As Tido J. Gaspar, a Slovak leader during the war remembers:

It wasn’t fear of the future, but fear of a renewed past. A return to the disgusting ‘Benešiada.’ We were afraid of it. Beneš was threatening us with revenge and promised to renew everything which had previously oppressed us Slovaks... He did not recognize for us any national rights. In fact he did not even recognize us as a nation. We were afraid of that. For this reason we did not see the Uprising as liberation from the path of

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<sup>84</sup> Baumgarten, “An Inquiry into Soviet Military Policy,” in *On All Fronts, Part 2*, 211.

<sup>85</sup> Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 215 and 222.

fascism, but rather as an unenticing overture to a new process of enslavement.<sup>86</sup>

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Vojtěch Mastný, Czechoslovak historian and exile, once observed of President Beneš that “his people respected but never loved him, a significant contrast to their feelings towards his predecessor, Tomáš Masaryk.”<sup>87</sup> As leader of the exile Czechoslovak Government during World War II, Beneš approached his mission of gaining restored independence for his enslaved and dismembered nation from the perspective of a tireless tactician and a diligent employee of the Czechoslovak state. He negotiated the complex divide between international and national demands, and successfully guaranteed Allied support for a postwar Czechoslovak renewal: no small task considering the illegitimate international status of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939. But President Beneš never fully united the Czechs and Slovaks around his personage. He never generated an unbreakable, unified Czechoslovak loyalty. Divorced from their home territory in London exile, the Czechoslovak Government during the war used a constructed national loyalty to garner international recognition, never turning inward long enough to assemble a cohesive, organic Czechoslovak front. Through part the innately impossible situation of an exiled organization and part the specific philosophy of Beneš’s government, the divide between London and those Czechs and Slovaks in occupied territory was never fully bridged. As the Soviet Red Army crept slowly westward towards the Czechoslovak border in the last years of the war, a popular song

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<sup>86</sup> Tido J. Gaspar, “Z Pamäti,” *Slovenske pohľady* 84, no. 12. (1968): 79. See also: Kirschbaum, *History of Slovakia*, 218.

<sup>87</sup> Mastný, *Czechs under Nazi Rule*, 140.

amongst Slovak citizens reflected this divide, as reported by the fascist Slovak administration: “Those who have money go to London/ Those who haven’t any wait for Stalin.”<sup>88</sup> London and the exiled Czechoslovaks were far removed from the majority of citizens ensnared in the German Protectorate or in totalitarian Slovakia. But instead of focusing on building national unity during the war, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, partly out of necessity and part by choice, used the internal resistance and manufactured showings of national loyalty primarily to garner Allied recognition, to receive legitimation from above rather than below.

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<sup>88</sup> Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 73.

## *Chapter Four*

### The Long Return Home: Triumph and Failure

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Prague in May of 1945 was the last major European city to be liberated from Nazi domination. Indeed, pockets of German resistance held out in Bohemia until May 11, three days after V-E Day and the unconditional surrender of Reich forces. As was characteristic of the short history of the small nation-state, the liberation of Czechoslovakia's capital city was a chaotic struggle of overlapping interests and muddled motivations. The Soviet Red Army had been slowly plodding westward through the country for the past half year and by the end of April was less than a hundred miles from Prague. President Beneš, members of his London government, as well as representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party exiled in Moscow during the war entered eastern Czechoslovakia on April 1 and eagerly followed in the wake of the Red Army's advance. To complicate the political situation, General George S. Patton's Third Army crossed into western Czechoslovakia on May 4 and within two days the Americans had liberated the vital industrial city of Pilsen, situated less than sixty miles from the Czechoslovak capital.<sup>1</sup>

Concurrent with these Allied advances on Prague, an internal uprising erupted in the capital on May 5 led by the newly established Czech National Council, a resistance organization established by urban Czechs who had survived the German suppression of

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<sup>1</sup> Pilsen was home to the Škoda Armaments Plant, a major manufacturer of German weaponry during the war.

earlier underground groups. The Czech National Council was “comprised of Czechs of all political persuasions” but dominated mostly by leftist leaders and communist organizers.<sup>2</sup> A smaller “Czech Central Committee” was simultaneously founded by more conservative Czechs, and collectively with the National Council directed the next five days of bitter urban resistance against the still potent remnant German forces.<sup>3</sup> The bloody Prague Uprising trudged forward without assistance from the Allied armies as the Soviet forces were still too far from the capital and American troops, much to Patton’s chagrin, were ordered by General Eisenhower at the insistence of Soviet leaders to leave the liberation of Prague to the Red Army. A group of American tanks did advance to within ten miles of the Czechoslovak capital but were forced to withdraw and abandon those partisan forces that were anticipating quick Allied support.<sup>4</sup>

Forced to arrange their survival on their own, the leaders of the Prague Uprising turned to an unlikely source for assistance: General Andrei Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Army, a group of anti-Stalinist Russian prisoners-of-war captured by the Germans who for the past half year had fought alongside the *Wehrmacht* against the Red Army. Vlasov’s troops, wearing German uniforms and using German weaponry, for two days aided the Czech partisans in their uprising before finally evacuating westward to avoid the advancing Red Army.<sup>5</sup> Czech resistance leaders would later claim that only

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<sup>2</sup> Zbyněk Zeman and Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 241. The Council was founded by a combination of leaders from the communist underground, from an independent trade union underground organization, and from Rada Tři, a democratic resistance organization composed of partisan fighters that had survived the suppressions of groups like *Obrana národa*, and ÚVOD.

<sup>3</sup> Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 202. Around 1 million German troops remained in the Czech lands in May 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 215.

<sup>5</sup> General Vlasov’s Russian Liberation Army turned on their German allies partly in hopes of avoiding dramatic Soviet retribution after the war. Vlasov and his army in fact surrendered to the American military on May 10 only to be returned to Stalin. Vlasov, the “defender of Moscow” just four years earlier, was

this intervention of the Vlasov army on May 6 and 7 prevented the wholesale slaughter of Czech partisans in Prague.<sup>6</sup> On May 8, 1945, the Czech National Council in a telegram to President Beneš declared that “the Czech people by revolutionary rising in Prague and in the country has liberated itself,” announcing the evacuation of the German occupation force in Prague and inviting Beneš’s government to return to the capital.<sup>7</sup> In the early hours of May 9 the first Soviet troops reached the outskirts of Prague and were met as liberators. A day later the first representatives of the Czechoslovak government returned home to the capital and on May 11 the final shots of the war in Europe were fired east of the city, as 800,000 German troops finally surrendered to the Red Army.

A symbolically charged question for Czechoslovaks arose from these events of May 1945: who was most responsible for liberating the nation and its capital city? With Americans, Soviets, Vlasov’s troops, competing Czech partisans, and Czechoslovak exiles from both London and Moscow all playing a part, the battle for Prague was a complicated affair. Just as disparate interests divided the nation during the war, postwar reconstruction would become destabilized by these questions of legitimacy. Who contributed most to Czechoslovakia’s liberation and who possessed the rightful authority to guide the nation out of wartime devastation? Out of a chaotic May 1945, Beneš attempted to translate the representative authority he gained through international recognition during the war into a tangible control over stable political structures. But for political exiles the hardest step sometimes comes after a successful homecoming, and achievements from the period of exile can soon be revealed as simply masks for

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executed in the Soviet capital on August 1, 1946. For more, see Catherine Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73-79.

<sup>6</sup> Arnošt Heidrich, “Remembrance of Resistance Years, 1938-1945,” in *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part 3*, ed. Lewis M. White (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 264.

<sup>7</sup> “Council Asks Beneš to Return to Prague,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 9, 1945, p. 6.

unresolved issues. Legitimacy of governance cannot be guaranteed irrefutably during exile, but must be fully realized upon return home.

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With his return to Prague on May 16, 1945, public opinion and proof of national loyalty became no longer things President Beneš simply showed the Allies to garner recognition, but became factors that profoundly affected his legitimate mandate to reclaim the position of Czechoslovak head of state. Although a clear divide had existed during the war between him and Czechoslovaks at home, fortunately for Beneš his popularity upon return was substantial. The President was enthusiastically welcomed by the grateful nation upon his entry into Prague and every time he and his wife appeared in public they were “cheered without restraint.”⁸ Passionate public celebration marked Beneš’s sixty-first birthday two weeks after Prague’s liberation as Czechoslovak “newspapers hailed him as one of the greatest figures in Czech history.”⁹ Still, though foreign governments had recognized him as Czechoslovak’s rightful president and postwar patriotic sentiment was in his favor, President Beneš upon his return felt necessarily required to justify his actions abroad and present his wartime struggle as motivated by complete subservience to the needs of his oppressed citizens back home. In his homecoming speech of May 16, 1945 delivered from the Old Town Square in the heart of Prague, Beneš emphasized his government’s unwavering union with the Czechoslovak people:

I look upon our revolt against Germany whether organized at home or abroad, our activities whether here in the Republic or in England, in Soviet

⁸ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 243.

⁹ “Beneš Hailed as Hero on Eve of 61st Birthday,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1945.

Russia, in America, in France or elsewhere as a single indivisible whole. Our revolt was an organic whole with complete unity of organization; there were never any sharp divisions as to principles, we were always conscious of our unity... For the entire six years of exile we lived and breathed as it were only by virtue of your life here, that we all the time felt ourselves to be one body and one blood with you, that we thought only of our people, that between us and you there were never disputes or differences. London, Moscow and the home country all had common sentiment and all went through the like experience.¹⁰

Beneš's idyllic representation of the exile movement was clearly false. Contrary to his description, the relationship between the exiles in London and Czechs and Slovaks at home was characterized by miscommunication, conflicting motivations, and an internal-external divide common to most exile movements.¹¹ Though the patriotic exuberance generated by the liberation helped mask some of these wartime tensions, profound and unresolved divisions still remained. For instance, the Czechoslovak exiles' compromise with leaders of the Slovak National Uprising and the Allied endorsement of a united postwar Czechoslovakia only temporarily dampened anxiety in Beneš's government over future Slovak separatism.¹² This guaranteed reestablishment from above of a united Czech and Slovak state would never necessarily ensure increased national unity upon Beneš's return, as evidenced in the noticeably unbalanced enthusiasm

¹⁰ Edvard Beneš, *Speech Delivered by President E. Beneš on the Old Town Square, Prague, on his Return to Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis Publishing Company, 1945), 6, 17.

¹¹ Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 163. For discussion of the divide between Czechoslovaks at home and in exile, see Chapter 3.

¹² The Czechoslovak government-in-exile's use of the Slovak National Uprising as a demonstration of united Czechoslovak patriotism in Slovakia helped convince the Allies that a reunited Czech and Slovak nation after the war would be stable and prosperous. In addition, drift between the three Allied Powers and disagreement over countries like Poland and Yugoslavia forced the Allies to abandon any previous notions of a Central European federation of states after the war, and encouraged consensus on reestablishing prewar Czechoslovakia: a relatively unproblematic compromise for American, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. See Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Volume II, 222; "Czechoslovakia and France," *The Times*, August 23, 1944, p. 3; and Chapter 3, 22-29.

with which Beneš and his government was welcomed in Czech versus Slovak lands.¹³ The need for Beneš to manufacture retrospectively a wartime national loyalty in his May 16, 1945 speech showed the President's fear that the apparent authority he had ensured for his government was planted in fragile foundations. President Beneš in 1945 attempted to reassure Czechs and Slovaks that his returning government was not a tool of the Allied Powers, but a faithful servant of the Czechoslovak people.

However, Edvard Beneš's concerns about national loyalty and the organic connection between governing and governed were not personal concerns, per se. President Beneš's grassroots popularity was still firmly persevered after the war, in spite of his wartime Machiavellian use of the internal resistance and his political maneuvering aimed disproportionately at receipt of international recognition. Upon transition from exile to fixed head of state, Beneš was forced to prove not necessarily his own legitimacy, but that the government he had organized during the war was worthy of continuing in its position of authority. Criticism at the end of the war was not focused on Beneš's right to rule, but on the composition and legitimate standing of his Czechoslovak government-in-exile.

By the end of the war, Beneš had by and large repaired the fractured reputation he enjoyed in 1938 in the wake of his handling of the Munich crisis. He still remained a controversial individual, "yet he had managed to preserve the continuity of the Czechoslovak state against heavy odds... He symbolized, for most of the Czechs and for

¹³ This discrepancy in public exuberance after liberation could have also been caused by higher populations in western Czechoslovakia or the symbolism of liberating Prague and its environs, but hesitant Slovak public opinion in 1945 was clearly evident as Slovakia was once again attached to its, at times, demeaning older brother, the Czech nation. See Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 243.

many Slovaks, the continuity with the Czechoslovakia of [Tomaš Garrigue] Masaryk.”¹⁴ As this symbol of Czechoslovak independence, Beneš was welcomed as the appropriate leader for a new, reconstructed Czechoslovakia. In a report on internal Czech political feeling at the end of 1944, the exile government in London found that “all the resistance groups, whatever their character, unconditionally recognize the authority of President Beneš.”¹⁵

While confident of Beneš’s domestic reputation, though, this same 1944 study also concluded that a large sections of Czechs “emphasize that the London Government is a suitable and appreciated body for the period of occupation, but that after the liberation Prague will have a new Government containing, not only some of the present members of the Government, but also new and younger men who have taken an active part at home in the struggle against the Germans.”¹⁶ Although the Allied Powers had long ago dropped the “provisional” appellation attached to Beneš’s government, many leading citizens inside occupied Czechoslovakia towards the end of the war viewed the exile government as a temporary institution that necessarily had to be altered upon its resumption of internal command. Resistance leaders from all the major noncommunist underground organizations asserted:

Aside from a few personalities like President Beneš or General Ingr, we were very critical of the London exiles and those in Moscow. We all recognized the authority of President Beneš, but we firmly believed that we should not have in our first free government at home, with a few exceptions, people who had been in the exile. The home front should make the decisions, not the exiles.¹⁷

¹⁴ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 243.

¹⁵ General Survey of the Situation in Czechoslovakia: 1944, p. 3, Folder 8, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

¹⁶ General Survey: 1944, p. 21, Folder 8, Box 24, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

¹⁷ Radomír Luža, “Rada Tři and General Luža,” in *On All Fronts, Part 3*, ed. Lewis M. White, 108. Luža claims this opinion was shared by the PRNV (Preparatory Revolutionary National Committee), Politické ústředí (Political Center), the Petition Committee ‘We Remain Faithful,’ and Obrana Národa (Nation’s

This criticism of the London exile government came from every direction, and the Czechoslovak Communist Party too found certain members of Beneš's government unacceptable, including some members endorsed by the noncommunist resistance: "In Britain, Ingr became the target of communists and crypto-communists who criticized his 'fascist tendencies' and attempted to have him replaced as Minister of Defense. They finally succeeded in the spring of 1945 when Beneš replaced him as Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces."¹⁸ Amidst this varied virulent criticism of the composition and structure of the London exile government, all that the majority of Czechs and Slovaks seemed capable of agreeing on was President Beneš's satisfactory status as the symbolic and diplomatic representative of the Czechoslovak state.

Part of the reason for this discrepancy in national opinion towards Beneš versus the wartime Czechoslovak Government lay in the steps Beneš took in the later years of the war to distance himself from his exile compatriots. By 1945, President Beneš and the weakened Czechoslovak government-in-exile had become two separate entities in the eyes of many Czechoslovaks. This process of disassociation began with Beneš's increasing reversion to authoritarian means of leadership. As the war progressed, Beneš more and more found himself making solitary policy decisions isolated from the assistance of other London Czechoslovak ministers. Jaroslav Stránský, Minister of Justice in the exile government, observed that President Beneš "rightly regarded himself to be the legislative authority, as there was no Parliament... If the Government in exile

Defense), the major noncommunist organizations of internal Czechoslovak resistance operating during the last years of the war.

¹⁸ Zdenek Kordina, "General Ingr and the Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich" in *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Part 2*, ed. Lewis M. White (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 145.

had the same rights as the Government had at home, it would be unjust, because the Government in exile is not responsible to Parliament.”¹⁹ Beneš became the main instigator of executive policy, the figurehead of the Czechoslovak nation abroad intricately involved in even the smallest of political decisions.

As Jaromír Smutný, Beneš’s personal assistant and the Chancellor of the Office of the President described in his diary, Beneš was “a machine for thinking and work, without human feelings but with human weaknesses,” and had difficulty delegating his decision-making and political work amongst his fellow exiles.²⁰ In December 1943, for instance, Beneš traveled to Moscow for the signing of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Mutual Assistance Treaty alone and without other members of the London government. Only a single, low ranking member of the Foreign Ministry, a military advisor, and two of Beneš’s personal assistants traveled with the President.²¹ Prominent Czechoslovak ministers such as Jan Masaryk, Hubert Ripka, or Jan Šrámek did not aid in the drafting and signing of the treaty. This separation between President Beneš and other members of the exile government continued to intensify into 1944 and 1945, with Beneš repeatedly making decisions discreetly and without prior consultation.²² Just as he was separated from his citizens at home he was also isolated from his fellow exiles abroad. But Beneš was still recognized at home and abroad as a firm national spokesman, a representative of

¹⁹ “Dr. Beneš’s Authoritative Regime,” Folder 10, Box 61, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

²⁰ Libuše Otáhalová and Milada Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939-1943* (Prague: Academia, 1966), 91-92. See also Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 110-111.

²¹ Only Jaromír Smutný, Edward Táborský, Jaroslav Kraus, and General Hasal joined Beneš. See Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 187.

²² Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy*, 177.

Czechoslovak national continuity, a tireless diplomatic tactician, and a symbol of the state.²³

By the latter years of the war, the London government was seen by its detractors as compositionally unrepresentative of the nation as a whole, though it had done a satisfactory job of speaking for the Czechoslovak people during the war. A main force of this destabilization for the London exiles was the presence of the Czechoslovak Communist exiles in Moscow during the war. These leaders had been influential in organizing the domestic communist resistance, forming Czechoslovak military units to fight on the Eastern Front alongside the Red Army, and generating increased Soviet support for a renewed Czechoslovakia. While the Czechoslovak Communists led by Secretary-General Klement Gottwald advised and influenced the Czechoslovak government-in-exile during the war and recognized Beneš's leadership role, they never officially joined the London organization.²⁴ Though responsive to the Communists' opinions, the London government's internal credibility was damaged due to its lack of direct Communist representation: "A form of pressure was maintained on the London government-in-exile by the refusal of the Communists in Moscow to participate in the London cabinet. They maintained that a new government would have to be formed when Czechoslovakia was liberated."²⁵ Looking to guarantee future stability through fair distribution of power, the Communists in Moscow as well as resistance leaders in occupied territory waited for the Czechoslovak Government to return from exile in 1945,

²³ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 243. See also Otáhalová and Červinková, eds., *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky*, 91-92.

²⁴ Jaroslav Opat, *O novou demokracii 1945-1948* (Prague: Čs. akademie věd, 1966), 37.

²⁵ Morton A. Kaplan, *The Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia* (Princeton: Center of International Studies, 1960), 3. See also Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, 181. Kalvoda asserts the Communist Party intentionally chose not to be a part of the government to secure itself an advantageous postwar reputation untainted from any official mistakes of the government-in-exile, but still be influential in political development during the war through unofficial sway and pressure.

eager to put Beneš's organization through a transformative process and insert themselves into influential political positions.

On the eve of reentry into Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš sealed his elevated status as head of state, isolated from all other London Czechoslovak exiles, by declaring that he would remain above future political strife and negotiation: "I am here, and will be at home, above the parties. That goes for them [the Communists], for the left bloc, for the centre, and the right."²⁶ But in stepping aside from politics, Beneš left his maligned and disordered government-in-exile to fight for legitimation on its own. For half a decade Beneš had molded the London government around his personage, but when time came to begin the process of reentry and transfer of power, Beneš left political decision-making to the newborn six-party parliamentary system and established a secure enclave for himself elevated above the partisan wrangling.²⁷ The tireless master of diplomatic maneuver secured his postwar status by letting go of the political entity he held so tightly during the war. As members of the Czechoslovak Government in London and exile Communist leaders in Moscow negotiated the structure of the homeward bound government in the winter of 1944-1945, Beneš did attempt to sustain some control by carefully placing his supporters in the various political parties, but with the exception of members of the centrist National Socialist Party, Beneš's loyalists were underrepresented and sparse. He had no prominent Slovak supporters and took little interest in the communist or

²⁶ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 202. Formerly a member of the left-leaning Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, Beneš disavowed any party ties with his return to the presidency in 1945.

²⁷ The new parliamentary system postwar reduced the number of political parties to six: four Czech and two Slovak. The four Czech-centered parties comprised one of the radical left (Czech Communist Party), one of the left (Social Democratic Party), one of the center (National Socialist Party), and one of the right (Christian Democratic Party). The two Slovak-centered parties were the Slovak Communist Party and the Slovak Democratic Party.

conservative parties.²⁸ The London government-in-exile that had successfully secured the continued existence of the Czechoslovak state by presenting a united anti-Nazi front during the war returned home in the spring of 1945 in a feeble condition. It faced sharp criticism from resistance leaders at home and from Communist exiles in Moscow. Most importantly, though, the governmental entity was detached from its leader and creator. President came out of the war a national hero, but left his government-in-exile in organizational limbo, waiting to be renewed as it reached Czechoslovak soil.

For the Czechoslovak Government as recognized by the Allied nations from 1940-1945 to survive with full domestic backing after the war, it had to adapt and incorporate political elements that, due to the inflexibility and immobility of rule from exile, could not be previously included. This process of “synthesis,” a term Beneš was fond of using, on the surface appeared successful but in many ways remained incomplete.²⁹ The act of reorganizing a stable wartime government damaged the Beneš group’s credibility and legitimacy, established a precedent for the future malleability of political structures, and did not fully mend political hostilities and tensions. The London exile government, remaining the core of the postwar government, struggled to translate its wartime mandate into an organic authority over a loyal Czechoslovak populace.

In the closing months of 1944, as the war appeared to be coming to an imminent close, Beneš and exiles from London and Moscow began negotiating the future structure and political principles of postwar Czechoslovakia. The restored nation, it was widely accepted, would return to the founding democratic doctrines of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk,

²⁸ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 229.

²⁹ “Revolution by Law?” *Time*, October 22, 1945.

but Czechoslovak politicians lead by the left-leaning Beneš also agreed on the need to strengthen and unify the nation socially and economically. In this vein, the government decided to implement a series of fairly radical reforms after liberation. These modifications of the of 1920 Czechoslovak Constitution, later referred to as the Beneš Decrees or the Košice program, included: the large-scale nationalization of heavy industry, the expulsion of two to three million unassimilated German and Hungarian minorities, the confiscation and redistribution of property owned by “collaborators,” and the reduction of the number of political parties in the future “National Front” parliamentary system to six, ostensibly minimizing the partisan squabbling of the prewar state. These reforms were to be instigated in the first few months after liberation through the authority of the President and the Provisional National Assembly, a temporary representative body in operation until national elections could establish a new Parliament.³⁰

On April 1, 1945 President Beneš and Czechoslovak political émigrés from London and Moscow reached the city of Košice in eastern Slovakia. Here, on home soil for the first time in six years, the government-in-exile rearranged itself to officially add representatives of the Communist Party and the home resistance, and to begin implementation of the government’s postwar political program. Members of the wartime government unpopular with citizens at home or with exiles in Moscow were squeezed out of the new “National Front” government. President Beneš aided in this rearrangement, in hopes of quashing any domestic uncertainty of the government’s unwavering patriotism

³⁰ See Miloš Calda, “Constitution-Making in Post-Communist Countries: A Case of the Czech Republic,” *Center for the Study of the Constitution, American Political Science Association*, <http://tucnak.fsv.cuni.cz/~calda/APSA99.pdf>; Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 222-5.

or antifascism, by advocating the broadest possible interpretation of the term “collaboration.” No connection between the future Czechoslovak government and the wartime Protectorate puppet administration was to remain, as even those “who had worked in resistance and the underground for us and were connected with the present regime” had to leave politics.³¹ This included the government-in-exile’s Minister of Finance and Minister of Social Affairs, who had both worked in the Protectorate government before emigrating to London. Many other London ministers did remain in the government after its transition home but were frequently moved to different posts, such as Prime Minister Jan Šrámek, leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Party, who became Deputy Prime Minister after resigning his post to Zdenek Fierlinger. Fierlinger was the ambassador to the Soviet Union during the war and the leader of the Social Democratic Party: a man exiles from London and Moscow as well as resistance leaders in Prague could agree on.

The London exiles who did maintain their same ministerial positions in 1945 were, through a process of reconnection and rebuilding of national loyalty, pressured to explain and justify their wartime actions to the Czechoslovak people. Even Jan Masaryk, one of the most popular Czechoslovak leaders, felt obliged to defend the policies of his Foreign Ministry: an indication of the significant discomfort held by many London exiles over the degree of popular support they truly garnered. In a statement to the Provisional Czechoslovak National Assembly after returning home, Jan Masaryk addressed

³¹ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 198. The Communists had no connection with the post-Munich Agreement Czechoslovak Republic of 1938-1939 or the German occupied Czech Protectorate and fascist Slovak state of 1939-1945 because the party was immediately outlawed in October 1938 after the acceptance of the Munich Agreement. The Czechoslovak Communist Party was free from any tinge of collaborationism after the war, which was not true for some parties that continued after Munich and had members who were at times involved in collaborationist activity with either the Nazis or the puppet Czech and Slovak governments.

Czechoslovaks who had suffered under fascist rule for six years and looked to reassure them of his solidarity and union with their plight. Conscious of popular dissatisfaction with the high retributive casualties generated by London-initiated acts of internal resistance during the war (as in the Heydrich assassination and the Slovak National Uprising), Masaryk asserted that he had always placed the survival and welfare of citizens in occupied territory over any political achievements of successful open resistance:

I believe that you also liked to listen to my broadcasts and for this I am exceedingly grateful to you. It was dreadful for me to think that one of our people would be put into prison or killed for listening to me. In this connection I would like to stress only one thing and that is that, during the first years of the war, I did not consciously incite you to revolt, knowing well that you were unarmed and unprepared, and time and time again I repeated to you that I was firmly convinced that when the right moment came you would fulfill your historical duty, as indeed came about.³²

Admitting faults in some areas of his Foreign Ministry during the war, Masaryk continued by promising changes in the structure and composition of the government-in-exile as it made the transition to its new role:

There are also those, whose war-time activities were not satisfactory. All of them, without exception, are either facing or will face an impartial but severe inner tribunal of my department... In the near future a number of changes will be made in our diplomatic service. It is my wish that the most important posts should be filled by young and capable people.³³

Masaryk and other members of the Czechoslovak government during the war were acutely aware of their separation from citizens back home, and after spending most of the war struggling for recognition from above by the Allied Powers, the London exiles in 1945 were forced to turn inward and scramble to secure public loyalty. It is interesting to

³² Jan Masaryk, *Statement on the Foreign Policy of Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis Publishing Company, 1946), 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 60.

note that the majority of exiles working in foreign-focused ministries during the war, possibly out of recognition of their successful negotiations with the Allied nations, retained their posts upon return home.³⁴ The reorganization of leadership in the spring of 1945 was aimed predominantly at ministries focused on internal, domestic issues. Perhaps indicative of the lack of internal loyalty the government-in-exile engendered, the Ministries of the Interior, Information, Agriculture, and Education all were restructured with new ministers taking the reigns.³⁵

Even with this extensive reorganization of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in the establishment of the Košice Government on April 5, 1945, Czechoslovak citizens, particularly leaders of the resistance movement, still felt Beneš's government did not go far enough to find equal representation for all social and political factions. Resistance groups such as the Czech National Council, the leader of the Prague Uprising, had long demanded that "the new, free Republic, which is being born and baptized with the blood we shed, will be our Republic, a Republic of the working people."³⁶ Beneš himself had emphatically concurred by promising resistance leaders a postwar government

³⁴ The four faces most familiar to foreign leaders remained in the government after the war: Jan Masaryk and Hubert Ripka (Foreign Ministers), Jaromír Smutný (Prime Minister) and, of course, President Edvard Beneš. Upon return home, London exiles still ran the internationally-focused Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, Finance, and, to a lesser degree, Justice. The important Ministry of National Defense was headed by General Ludvík Svoboda, not a member of the London government but also not attached to the Moscow exiles or the home internal resistance. He was the leader of the Czechoslovak Legion on the Eastern Front, a supposedly "apolitical" figure who replaced the previous minister General Ingr after Communists questioned Ingr's "fascist tendencies."

³⁵ For a summary of ministerial appointments during and after the war, see Office of the Czech Republic Government, "The Czechoslovak National Committee and the Interim Standing of Czechoslovak Bodies in Emigration," and, "The Post-War Years 1945 – 1948," *History of Previous Governments*, <http://www.vlada.cz/en/urad/historie>.

³⁶ Jiří Doležal and Jan Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia's Fight: Documents of the Resistance Movement of the Czechoslovak People 1938-1945* (Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1964), 112.

“composed mainly of workers from home with a number of workers from abroad.”³⁷ But the Czechoslovak Government as it transitioned home in the spring and summer of 1945 was comprised almost exclusively of expert-elite political exiles from London and Moscow, not of working class leaders from the home front. As Beneš biographer Zbyněk Zeman summarized: “In their haste, Beneš, as well as the incoming government, overlooked the representation, both political and military, of the resistance at home... The people who had fought and suffered at home during the war felt themselves to be squeezed out by the professional liberators after their return from exile.”³⁸ As one resistance fighter complained: “Old party institutions and the new government in Košice took over the powers in the new republic and pushed the people of the resistance into the background. The dreams of democratic reforms by the domestic resistance were taken over by the organized fight for power.”³⁹

To aid in the reunification of exile and internal political structures after liberation, the Czechoslovak Government, with enthusiastic urging by Klement Gottwald’s Communists in Moscow, had long planned to activate a system of grassroots “National Committees” to act as local representative governing bodies. These organs of community governance instead of quelling domestic dissatisfaction, though, unintentionally acted as destabilizing influences from 1945 to 1948, especially as popular resistance leaders were left out of the central government. President Beneš had hoped that these National Committees, constituted initially through proportional representation of the six political parties but later through elections at local meetings, would enable increased popular

³⁷ “Dr. Beneš’s Message to the State Council, February 3, 1944,” Folder 15, Box 90, Štefan Osuský Papers, 1901-1992, Hoover Archives.

³⁸ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 244.

³⁹ Luža, “Rada Tří and General Luža,” in *On All Fronts: Part 3*, 98.

participation in the renewed government: a quick way democratically to increase national loyalty and legitimacy for the returning government. This attempt to democratize and decentralize the government had been proposed as early as 1943, and at the end of December 1944 Beneš proclaimed: “We in Czechoslovakia shall not return to 1938. We shall have a new Constitution and a decentralized administration... Our administration will be built up from the bottom, from local community to the district, the province and the State.”⁴⁰ But these decentralizing National Committees, organized gradually in the first half of 1945 during the Red Army’s advance through Czechoslovakia, did not operate as unifying channels between citizens and the renewed government in Prague. After using the National Committees as local organizational structures during the period of liberation and transition into new parliamentary elections, Beneš and his London compatriots soon lost interest in the Committees and turned their focus to matters of the central government.⁴¹ With reduced involvement came a loss of control and influence over the Committees and, without resistance leaders in the central government, these institutions created a polarity between professional politicians ruling from above and grassroots activity from below. Attempting to decentralize the government as it returned home only damaged its credibility without effectively mending exile-domestic relations.⁴² The end result of these National Committees and their weak connection to the returning government was that active local organizers of the Czechoslovak Communist Party gained majority influence over many of the Committees.⁴³ President

⁴⁰ “The New Czechoslovakia,” *The Times*, December 27, 1944, p. 3.

⁴¹ Martin Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 57.

⁴² “The Strategy of Communist Infiltration: The Case of Czechoslovakia,” pp. 9, 15-16, Folder 13, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

⁴³ See: Doležal and Křen, eds., *Czechoslovakia’s Fight*, 114; Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia*, 47, 87.

Beneš, always supportive of the National Committees publicly, eventually admitted to Minister of Justice Jaroslav Stránský that he believed the “National Committees in the communist understanding are in fact soviets”: revolutionary bodies not primarily aimed at maintaining the status quo democratic governance of Beneš’s government.⁴⁴

Amidst this internal uncertainty and the reordering of political structures in 1945, the Czechoslovak Government, a government comprised almost entirely of World War II exiles that owed its authority primarily to the support of the three Allied Powers, found itself unfamiliarly independent and detached from an Allied umbilical cord. As with all rebuilding European countries in 1945, Czechoslovakia depended on a great deal of foreign military and economic support. But compared to other nations, though, Czechoslovakia seemed a low priority for the Allies. After eventual success in their arduous struggle for recognition in the first few years of the war, Czechoslovak politicians presented little controversy or worry for the Allies; indeed Allied press sources confidently declared that “of all the governments-in-exile, that of Czechoslovakia has had the least difficulty with its people or with other nations.”⁴⁵ As the Soviets, British, and Americans intensely argued over the postwar future and governmental composition of countries like Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Germany, the Czechoslovak Government was assumed to be adequately stable and politically

⁴⁴ Josef Korbel, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 91. It is not definitively clear whether or not the Communist Party, an adamant proponent during the war for the National Committees, had always intended for the Committees to be used as soviets in the Russian Revolution model. It is fairly clear, though, that Beneš agreed to establish these Committees not just to placate the Communists, but also because he believed they would productively aid reunification and ensure the stable future of his progressive Czechoslovak Republic. In the Communist rise to power in 1948, the National Committees did not actually end up acting as revolutionary institutions in the strict soviet model, but they did act as effective channels for Communist mobilization of their allied populations. See Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia*, 39-40; “In the Funnel of Two Tornados: The Nazi and Soviet Captures of the Heart of Europe: Political Diaries,” p. 2.88, Folder 3, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

⁴⁵ “Free Life Begins Once More in Prague,” *Los Angeles Times*, May, 11, 1945.

satisfactory.⁴⁶ For example, the United States in its “Report on Europe to the United Nations” of 1945 spoke very little of Czechoslovakia, emphasizing that “the Czechoslovak Government’s relations with the British and Soviet Governments are excellent, and present no problems. Czechoslovak-American relations remain excellent, as they have been in the past. We have no questions to raise about Czechoslovakia now; nor have Great Britain or the U.S.S.R., as far as we know.”⁴⁷ Surprisingly, in the year after World War II ended and Czechoslovakia began its process of reconstruction after six years of German occupation, the seemingly peripheral countries of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru each received three times more money than Czechoslovakia through the United States’ Lend-Lease program. During the over six years of Lend-Lease expenditure, Czechoslovakia received a mere \$503,000: the fifth lowest amount of all thirty-eight countries participating in the program and by far the least amount for Central and Eastern Europe.⁴⁸

This seeming lack of worry about Czechoslovakia by no means indicates that the Allied Powers were uninvolved in the nation’s postwar progression. On the contrary, the Allies and the Soviet Union in particular were highly interested in Czechoslovakia’s

⁴⁶ Beneš’s conversations with Allied leaders from 1943-1945 predominantly centered on Beneš’s use as an intermediary in bringing compromise between the dueling Polish governments in London and Lublin, sponsored by the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets, respectively. Czechoslovak developments were seemingly less and less discussed. See: USSR Foreign Ministry Commission for the Publication of Diplomatic Documents, *Correspondence Between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 185-193, 331-346; and, Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Volume II, 651.

⁴⁷ Report on Europe to the UN, 1945, President's Secretary's Files (PSF) Safe Files: Czechoslovakia Index, Franklin D. Roosevelt Digital Archives, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

⁴⁸ In contrast, Poland and Yugoslavia received \$17 million and \$32 million respectively during the war. Czechoslovakia was the only future Eastern Bloc country to accept an invitation to Marshall Plan discussions with the United States in 1947, but Czechoslovak leaders subsequently rescinded their acceptance at the insistence of Stalin and the Soviet Union. See Council on Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Relations 1945-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 154.

development, though not nearly to the degree of coercive scheming envisioned by Western Cold War-era historians.⁴⁹ This separation between Allies and Czechoslovaks does illustrate, however, the dramatic transition Beneš's government had to undergo in shifting from an exile organization utterly dependent on international recognition and endorsement to an independent entity forced to draw support from the Czechoslovak populace for legitimation. The Czechoslovak Government continued in its precarious wartime position as it transitioned home: perched between foreign supporters that less and less played a direct role and the domestic Czechoslovak masses that were unsure of their political loyalties and disconnected from their returning exiled leaders.

In this atmosphere of political murkiness and in the aftermath of a brutal war that thoroughly shattered the social and economic structures of the state, President Beneš enthusiastically pushed forward his government's plan for reconstruction in 1945. However, "by consenting to rush through a large part of the Košice programme, Beneš helped to weaken the [national] assembly before it met." Through the government's quick implementation of progressive reconstruction, "a glut of legislation was generated during the first months after the war, which led to an unrestrained growth of low-quality bureaucracy." These poorly managed governmental structures did not effectively work to regain or grow domestic loyalty, and Beneš's dramatic reforms only helped to further

⁴⁹ Clearly a great number of texts have been published dealing with the Soviet Union's involvement in the internal development of Eastern European countries from 1945-1948 and the formation of the "Iron Curtain." In terms of Czechoslovakia's specific relationship with the USSR, Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia's Role in Soviet Strategy*, presents a competent example of the common interpretation of Cold War-era Western historians before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, uses a wide variety of newly available archival sources to depict more accurately the Soviet role in Eastern Europe. Other useful post-1991 works include George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

destabilize an already war-torn national societal structure.⁵⁰ Yossi Shain in his study of exile governments observed the political exile's need to "force the future into the present while at the same time trying to preserve the past."⁵¹ It was this impossible task that the returning London exiles hoped to accomplish in 1945: to secure their legitimacy by demonstrating their past achievements and legal continuity while simultaneously forcefully guaranteeing a dramatically new future of promised prosperity. The Czechoslovak Government may have appeared secure enough to accomplish this potentially destabilizing task, but caught between insufficient international support and a wavering, inconstant national loyalty, Beneš faced an uncertain though optimistic future in 1945.

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On February 20, 1948, all twelve ministers from the noncommunist National Socialist, Christian Democratic and Slovak Democratic Parties tendered their resignations to President Beneš. The ministers resigned in opposition to the Communist Party's tightened control over the Ministry of the Interior and the state police, and out of anxiety that recent Communist agitation pointed to an imminent Party attempt to seize power. With their resignations the democratic ministers hoped to force the Government's dissolution and accelerate the spring national election that, as opinion polls indicated, might result in a twenty to thirty percent drop in votes for the Communist Party.⁵² Their

⁵⁰ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 245-6.

⁵¹ Shain, *Frontier of Loyalty*, 32.

⁵² Korbel, *Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia*, 198-9. In the election of 1946 the nominally separate Czech and Slovak Communist Parties combined to receive 38 percent of the national vote (31% Czech, 7% Slovak). With his party receiving a majority of the vote, Communist leader Klement Gottwald became the Prime Minister. The National Socialist Party, Christian Democratic Party, and the Slovak Democratic

plans went dismally awry, though. The Czechoslovak Constitution stipulated that the Government would be dissolved if one-half of its ministers resigned, but of twenty-six total ministers only twelve – one less than half – resigned on February 20. The ministers of the democratic parties mistakenly anticipated that right-wing ministers of the Social Democratic Party or at least the nonaffiliated Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk would join them. Instead, the insufficient resignations propelled Czechoslovakia into a weeklong national crisis and towards an uncertain political future.

The resignations placed President Beneš in a complicated, delicate position as the whole nation waited breathlessly to see what action he would take. Would Beneš accept or reject the resignations? Would he dissolve Prime Minister Gottwald's Government even with over half the ministers still in power, or would he allow Gottwald to appoint Communist-friendly ministers to fill the vacancies? The situation soon developed, in Beneš's own words, into a "second Munich."⁵³ As one western reporter observed: "Everyone looked to Beneš to do something – the Army, of which he was Commander in Chief, the democratic parties, and the mass of people who had been taught by incessant propaganda to idolize him... But always he looked more worried, less decisive. The harassed stare in his pale blue eyes never left him."⁵⁴ The majority of the twelve resigning ministers had been members of Beneš's government-in-exile in London during the war, and those few who had not officially been part of the exile government had been close allies. The resigning anticommunists included such influential exile leaders as

Party received around 18%, 16%, and 14% of the 1946 vote, respectively. The final major party, the Social Democratic Party, had won 12% of the vote. The leftist Social Democratic Party by 1948 was divided between left-wing members adherent to the policies of the Communist Party and a rising right-wing opposition more aligned with the moderate National Socialist Party. See Oskar Krejčí, *History of Elections in Bohemia and Moravia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 193-7.

⁵³ Kaplan, *Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia*, 27.

⁵⁴ Charles Foley, "One of Europe's Famous Men Battles Against 'The Last Enemy,'" *Daily Express*, September 2, 1948.

former Premier Jan Šrámek, former Foreign Minister Hubert Ripka, and former Minister of Finance Jaroslav Stránský: men who were with Beneš in London from the beginning and now anxiously waited for the President to decide their and the nation's political future. As one contemporary observer, sympathetic to the Communist cause recollected: "In one way the crisis was a painful personal problem for [Beneš]. Several of the resigning Ministers had been lifelong friends and associates, and had worked with him during the long years of exile in London."⁵⁵ If 1945 brought a dramatic reordering to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile as recognized by the Allies during the war, the expulsion of the London democratic core in 1948 would constitute a clear break from the government Beneš so forcefully gave life. On February 25, 1948, after a week of anxious national uncertainty, Beneš would eventually submit to the demands of the Communist Party and accept Klement Gottwald's reorganized Cabinet, painfully witnessing his own government dissolve before his very eyes.

The Communist Party's capture of power in 1948 and the formation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic have been comprehensively examined in a wide variety of publications. This study does not attempt to begin to explain how Czechoslovakia was communized after World War II. Many diverse developments between 1945 and 1948 led to the February Revolution, including grassroots and parliamentary maneuvering by the Communist Party, contending foreign influence from the Soviet Union and Western Powers, social, cultural and economic changes amongst the Czech and Slovak populations, and disorganized resistance from democratic politicians.⁵⁶ As a bookend to the development of Czechoslovak exile political structures from 1938-1945, though, the

⁵⁵ Walter Storm, *The Crisis in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis Publishing Company, 1948), 33.

⁵⁶ For more on the rise of Czechoslovak communism, see Abrams, *Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*; Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*; Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia*.

collapse of the Košice coalition government in 1948 provides an interesting viewpoint through which to evaluate Beneš's wartime struggle for legitimacy.

The resigning democratic ministers made two main political miscalculations in February of 1948. Firstly, they lacked an internally well-organized anticommunist front and remained disconnected from the two leading pillars of Czechoslovak democracy, Edvard Beneš and Jan Masaryk. After spending wartime exile loyally following the direction of these two remaining direct descendants, literally and figuratively, of the nation's universally esteemed founding father Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the former London exiles in 1948 caught the President and the Foreign Minister off guard with their sudden February resignations.⁵⁷ Though unclear exactly why the two lifelong campaigners for Czechoslovak independence and stability were not better informed of their colleagues' resignation plans, the fact that Beneš and Masaryk remained paralyzed bystanders to the February events exhibits how far the wartime London political core had drifted apart.⁵⁸

The second major mistake the democratic ministers made was to resign without a contingency plan. They counted on the crisis being solved from above through the

⁵⁷ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 243. Zeman describes the position of Edvard Beneš and Jan Masaryk from 1945-1948 as unstable but secured through tradition: "They were the heirs but not the makers of a proud tradition, which largely derived from the personality of Jan's father."

⁵⁸ National Socialist leaders Hubert Ripka and Petr Zenkel had met with Beneš on February 18 and informed the President that they were intending to boycott cabinet meetings until the Minister of the Interior Václav Nosek agreed to reform the communist-dominated state police. Apparently, though, the two ministers did not make it clear to Beneš whether they planned to resign from the Government or merely abstain from meetings. After the February crisis there was speculation that Beneš was actually behind the democrats' maneuver to reduce communist power in the Government and Parliament, but this now appears to be untrue. Jan Masaryk was noticeably uninvolved in the February crisis and remained Minister of Foreign Affairs after the communists seized control of the government. In one of the only incidents of violence from the communist revolution, Jan Masaryk was found dead in the courtyard of the Foreign Ministry on the morning of March 10, 1948. Whether Masaryk jumped or was thrown out of his bathroom window, whether he committed suicide or was assassinated, remains debated to this day. See Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 264; Foley, "One of Europe's Famous Men Battles Against 'The Last Enemy,'" *Daily Express*; Zbyněk Zeman, *The Masaryks* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 212-3; and, Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia*, 217.

Government's dissolution or President Beneš's refusal to accept the resignations, but the ministers, as they had been during their period of exile, relied too highly on diplomatic solution and were unfortunately disconnected from the general Czechoslovak populace: "They had not prepared for any other solution to the crisis they had initiated, such as the one with which the Communists presented them by mobilizing the public on the street."⁵⁹ The Communist Party between 1945 and 1948 had successfully formed an organic, grassroots support structure through the party's machinery, the National Committees, and their allies in the independent Trades Union movement.⁶⁰ The resigning democrats, on the other hand, generated little visible support in February 1948 as vociferous public cries for President Beneš to accept the resignations drowned out more subdued anticommunist rallies.⁶¹ Although the majority of the nation was not crying out for a communist revolution, the anticommunist domestic population and its democratic leaders in Prague were too detached and critical of one another to present a coherent defense: a recurrent theme from 1939 onward. For example, Slovak voters, of whom seventy percent had voted against the Communists in 1946, were deeply unsupportive of the Czech democratic leaders surrounding Beneš, as they had been during the war. Ignoring Slovakia's standing as a potential stronghold for liberal democracy, "Beneš, together with the Czech socialist parties, gave the Slovak Democrats no assistance in their hour of need, because they still feared the centrifugal tendencies in Slovakia more than the

⁵⁹ Abrams, *Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*, 276.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Communist Party membership increased from 28,000 people at the time of liberation to almost 1.4 million by the end of 1947.

⁶¹ See: Abrams, *Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*, 4-5; Storm, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia*, 60-5.

ambitions of the Communists.”⁶² Questions of national loyalty unanswered during the war clearly remained to assist in the country’s destabilization in 1948.

One of the most interesting developments of the February crisis vis-à-vis the legitimacy and continuance of the London government-in-exile after the war was the role and treatment of President Beneš. Beneš in 1948 perched high above parliamentary political squabbling in his presidential function, the symbolic manifestation of the Czechoslovak state and the returning national hero of two world wars. All sides of the political spectrum embraced the President, as his personal secretary Edward Táborský observed, “everybody, including the Communists and the Slovak national council, basked in Beneš’s immense popularity.”⁶³ But as head of state the ailing Beneš, sufferer of multiple strokes over the previous few years, had become an isolated figurehead who lacked the intricate control of political details he had possessed during the war. As such Beneš, trapped between the Communists, his fellow former London exiles, and an increasingly anxious Czechoslovak populace, in February 1948 became an emblematic hero for all sides. His popularity and legacy were used by both the Communists and democrats to legitimize their arguments and rally their constituents. In late 1947, the Communist Party had used a dubious assassination plot against Beneš allegedly emanating from separatists in the Slovak Democratic Party, to tighten its control over the state police and attack the Slovak Democrats.⁶⁴ The Communists in this sense presented themselves as the guardians of President Beneš, not as the revolutionary opponents of his democracy. While clearly opposed to Beneš’s compatriots from the wartime London

⁶² Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 263. See also Kaplan, *Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia*, 3; “Analysis of the Communist Coup,” Folder 2, Box 2, Ivo D. Duchacek Papers, 1939-1988, Hoover Archives.

⁶³ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 239.

⁶⁴ Storm, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia*, 16.

government, the Communists continued into 1948 to support the President enthusiastically, particularly in late February as Beneš decided whether or not to allow Prime Minister Gottwald to fill the resigning ministers' vacant posts. In a culminating Communist rally in Prague on February 25, before President Beneš had even decided to calm the crisis by complying with Communist demands, the large crowd reportedly repeated corresponding chants of "Long Live President Beneš" and "Long Live Premier Gottwald" – the two men equally esteemed, with Beneš used as a legitimizing bridge to Gottwald's socialist future.⁶⁵

Conversely, the democratic resistance during and after the February Communist rise to power also held tightly to the image of President Beneš, evoking Beneš's wartime ideals for Czechoslovak independence and his connection with the liberal democracy of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Democratic Czechoslovaks like their rival communists never in 1948 questioned the legitimate authority of President Beneš. In anticommunist youth demonstrations at the end of February and beyond, "picture postcards of Beneš were waved defiantly at the Red police. Such was the strength of the patriotic legend that, long after he had ceased himself to resist, Beneš was still the symbol of resistance to his country."⁶⁶ The tragedy for Edvard Beneš, though, was that the legitimacy he had successfully fought so hard to reacquire in the years between Munich and the liberation of Prague had by 1948 distorted into a symbolic entity divorced from tangible political control. Beneš, as in the last years of the war, was utterly alone in 1948. His London government had dissolved around him and he, as he had done in 1938, was forced to make the only decision that he felt could spare his nation from frenzied violence:

⁶⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶ Foley, "One of Europe's Famous Men Battles Against 'The Last Enemy,'" *Daily Express*.

acquiescence in the Communist Party's reorganization of the government.⁶⁷ Beneš's government-in-exile between 1945 and 1948 was unable to capture fully the popular support and domestic loyalty that had been impossible to ensure during its period of exile. As President Beneš secured his own sovereign status, this gap between governing and governed widened, exacerbating the tensions that resulted in the 1948 collapse: "[Beneš] insisted that he should stand above the parties, and placed himself in a position where he stood aloof from the people. He could not reach the people, and they could not get to him, however hard they tried."⁶⁸

On February 25, after a week of impassioned demonstration of procommunist public support in the form of mass protests, public gatherings, workers' strikes, and parliamentary maneuver, President Beneš officially accepted the resignations of the twelve democratic ministers and allowed Prime Minister Gottwald to restructure the Government with Communist Party members and their allies. Hoping to act as the last moderating democratic influence amidst dramatic communist restructuring of the state, Beneš remained in the presidency for another three months after the February "Revolution," though he spent much of this time isolated and in poor health on his estate in southern Bohemia.⁶⁹ In May 1948 after the Communist implementation of a new constitution for the nation, President Beneš resigned. On September 3, 1948, Edvard Beneš died at his estate of natural causes. The outpouring of national grieving upon the occasion of Beneš's funeral, "even when guarded by the Communist Peoples' Militia, was the last occasion for the expression of protest against the regime that fateful year."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ivo Duchacek, "The February Coup in Czechoslovakia," *World Politics* 2, no. 4 (1950): 527.

⁶⁸ Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 273.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 271-2.

⁷⁰ "To Czechs, Beneš Symbolized Resistance," *New York Times*, February 11, 1990, A24.

Tragically for Beneš, though, his powerful symbolic presence as unifying Czechoslovak democratic leader, respected by communists and anticommunists alike, had been insufficient in the three years preceding to hold together his returning government.

Conclusion

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In November and December 1989, the peaceful Velvet Revolution brought an end to almost forty-two years of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia. Freed from the limitations of totalitarian censorship and rigid Cold War paradigms, Czechs and Slovaks at home and abroad were catalyzed to reevaluate the meaning and history of seventy years of Czechoslovak statehood. In this process of national introspection, noncommunist leaders like the country's first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, regained prominence and open veneration. The standing of the nation's still enigmatic second president, Edvard Beneš, however, remained ambiguous and contentious. Czech and Slovak émigrés in the United States joined in this active reconstruction of national history, and a series of letters published in the *New York Times* from December 1989 to February 1990 captured one particularly poignant example of this debate. In a December 30 response to an article advocating the rehabilitation of President Masaryk as a national icon in the new Czechoslovakia, historian Sylvia Crane wondered, "But why omit Eduard Benes from the constellation of founding heroes?"<sup>1</sup> One Czechoslovak reader disagreed, countering with a scathing critique of Beneš that portrayed the tragic figure as a shamed national deserter:

President Eduard Benes failed twice: the first time when he let Czechoslovakia go to the Nazis in 1939 and left for exile in Britain (which participated in the Munich pact); and for the second time when he did the same with the Communists in 1948 (and went into "inner exile"). The roles of Masaryk and Benes are precisely the opposite: the first is linked

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia E. Crane, "With Masaryk, Benes Deserves Restoration," *New York Times*, December 30, 1989, p. 24.

with achieving Czechoslovak independence, the second with losing it. A president is similar to the captain who must be the last to leave the sinking ship. Benes is not a hero like Vaclav Havel, who always refused to emigrate.<sup>2</sup>

Edvard Beneš, as one of the three founding fathers of Czechoslovakia in 1918, spent twenty-three years of his political career residing in his beloved state: seventeen as its foreign minister and six as its president. Yet Beneš's life both politically and personally was defined by the nine years he spent in exile. Some Czechs and Slovaks after the close of the Cold War chose to remember Beneš fondly for his efforts in exile to ensure Czechoslovak independence in 1918 and 1945, while others, conversely, chose to remember President Beneš for his failures, for his abandonment of the enslaved nation in 1938 and again in 1948. As such, Beneš "became all things to all men," symbolic of both victory and defeat depending on personal viewpoint.<sup>3</sup> As in 1948 when Beneš was held to symbolize both the socialist future and the democratic past, today the image of President Beneš carries much contradictory meaning. It is this incongruity between the symbolic and the real, the image of the governor and the opinion of the governed, that in many ways defines the historical reputation of Edvard Beneš to the present day.

The Czechoslovak Government in London from 1939 to 1945 was one of the many exile governmental organizations that existed during World War II and represents the many problems confronted by most political exiles: the struggle to unite disparate voices into one necessarily united exile front, the difficulty of ensuring international

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<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Jedlicka, "Czechs Don't Regard Benes as a Hero," *New York Times*, January 21, 1990, E20. Václav Havel, Czech playwright and democratic dissident leader, on December 29, 1989 became the first noncommunist Czechoslovak president since Beneš forty-one years before.

<sup>3</sup> Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 141. Opinion towards Beneš does also not seem to carry much easily definable pattern to it either, as Czechs and Slovaks, communists and democrats, the young and the old vary in their view towards the controversial figure.

recognition while possessing no coercive control over the territory claimed to be represented, the near impossibility of communicating with citizens in the home nation or organically generating a national domestic loyalty, the hardship involved in translating presumed legitimacy into tangible authority upon homecoming. Yet the exile government centered on President Beneš also presents an exceptional case. Of all political exiles at the beginning of the war, the Czechoslovaks had possibly the greatest difficulty in generating international recognition, only being officially acknowledged as unconditional national representatives three to four years after the German occupation of their country. Nevertheless, although the early years of the war were an uphill battle for Beneš's government by comparison to the exile governments of such nations as Poland, Yugoslavia, Belgium or Norway, Czechoslovakia was the only European nation east of Germany to have its prewar government restored in 1945, albeit a substantially altered government.<sup>4</sup>

Edvard Beneš always viewed his nation as treading a middle path in Europe, physically and philosophically situated in the center of the continent, a “bridge between the East and West.”<sup>5</sup> Never succumbing to the pull of nationalistic fascism nor looking to enforce totalitarian socialism on its people, Beneš's Czechoslovakia tried to inhabit an area of calm between the extremes from 1918 and 1938. After World War II, Beneš again looked to draw equally from the liberal democracy of the West and the socialist utopian thought of the East. It is to this moderate position that the Czechoslovak government owes its uniqueness. This attempt to build “a temple for peace” somehow brought, even amidst the merciless violence and turmoil of twentieth century Europe, a

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<sup>4</sup> Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. I, 206.

<sup>5</sup> “Revolution by Law?” *Time*, October 22, 1945.

miraculous lack of bloodshed to Czechoslovakia during even the most dramatic of national events.<sup>6</sup> In its birth in 1918 and its dissolution in 1992, in its occupation by a foreign force in 1938 and 1968, in its restoration of democracy in 1945 and 1989, and in its rejection of Edvard Beneš's democratic government in 1948, Czechoslovakia always seemed to experience dramatic change without a shot being fired, without a head of state being violently removed, without a population being devastated. Political change in Czechoslovakia tended to come more subtly than in neighboring countries. The political history of Czechoslovakia is acutely dominated by complex processes of legitimation, of precise maneuver for recognition and competition for national loyalty, instead of authority enforced through violence and coercive control: the very processes of dramatic yet relatively nonviolent political conflict on which exiles divorced from their nation's monopoly of violence depend. As a small nation created in exile through diplomatic maneuver during World War I and saved from fascist domination or postwar dismemberment from exile during World War II, the history of Czechoslovakia is in many ways the history of the political exile.

The difficulties and missteps of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile as it fought for recognition and campaigned for national unity help illustrate the hopelessly ensnared and immobile position of the political exile in general. Leaders separated from their nation's systems of control are forced to plant their claims to authority in unstable foreign soil. Exiles tend to be so necessarily reliant on the whims and wishes of supporting nations that an external-internal divide becomes unavoidable. Forced to find legitimation from above, exiles lose the ability to ensure legitimacy horizontally through

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<sup>6</sup> Edward B. Hitchcock, *"I Built a Temple for Peace": The Life of Eduard Beneš* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), xi.

a unity of diverse national leaders or from below through successful leader-subject communication. The government-in-exile frequently becomes an important symbol of national continuance and unity, but has difficulty in translating this national symbolism into stable political control. Surviving the impossible leap from imagined exile rule to realized future authority becomes no easy task.

Historian Bradley F. Abrams worried in his 2004 study of Czechoslovak communism that, in the present-day Czech and Slovak Republics, “public debate has been muted by a wide but uncritical consensus that stresses the democracy of the postwar state and the heroism of its noncommunist leaders in their struggle against a Communist Party takeover.”<sup>7</sup> But while pre-1948 democratic leaders at the end of the Cold War did regain a high level of public reverence, most Czech and Slovak intellectuals still hold an ambiguous view of Czechoslovakia’s second president and the democratic government that dissolved around him after World War II. While recognizing his triumphs, the life of the Edvard Beneš cannot be viewed divorced from his dramatic failures. To this day, while Beneš is enshrined alongside Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Alexander Dubček in the pantheon of influential former national leaders, his inability to secure stability and continuance for his government after World War II remains a warning to all present Czech and Slovak leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Václav Havel, leader of the Czechoslovak democratic opposition in the 1970s and 1980s and after the Velvet Revolution the nation’s first noncommunist president since 1948, drew inspiration from the democratic traditions of his predecessor Edvard Beneš

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<sup>7</sup> Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Dubček led the nation during the ultimately unsuccessful Prague Spring reforms of 1968.

when shaping the ideology of his post-communist state. But while Havel “drew intellectual sustenance...from the wisdom of Eduard Benes,” Beneš in his death as in his life was not held to be a figure sufficiently capable of bringing unity to all Czechs and Slovaks.<sup>9</sup> In 1992, in the third year of his presidency, President Havel fought desperately to hold together a nation about to submit to the century-old centrifugal nationalist force attempting to split it in two.<sup>10</sup> On the eve of a Czech-Slovak divorce, Havel looked to the nation’s last democratic president not as an exemplary model, but as a warning: “Some believe Havel is obsessed with the fear of becoming a second Eduard Benes, the Czech president who led his country to freedom from the Nazis only to be swept from power by the communists in 1948.”<sup>11</sup> A tragic, isolated, and controversial figure in his lifetime, Edvard Beneš remained a symbol of Czechoslovak defeat and democratic failure even half a century after his death.

Political leaders have the unfortunate tendency of being viewed by their citizens and by historians alike as a symbolic embodiment of their state. As such, the dramatic life of Edvard Beneš does seem to present an appealing representation of a half century of Czechoslovak history. As a symbol of Czechoslovak struggle and disunity and as emblematic of the lost politician of a small nation disconnected from his own citizens and trampled over by larger powers, the figure of President Beneš may today present a more fitting national icon than the universally adored but unsuitably too triumphant first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. But we must be careful to steer clear of symbolism, as symbolism seems to be what doomed President Beneš himself. In his almost seven years spent in exile between 1938 and 1945, Beneš again and again mistook symbolic

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<sup>9</sup> Jerzy Kosinski, “Vaclav Havel and the Politics of Hope,” *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1990, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Zeman, *Life of Edvard Beneš*, 263.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Green, “Hate Ruins Havel’s Democratic Dream,” *The Times*, June 7, 1992.



importance for something real, mistook the symbolic legitimacy that foreign recognition can bestow for tangible political control. In the end, in 1948 and again in the present, Beneš himself became merely a symbol, an unreachable figure that all seemed capable to assess but none really seemed to know. In the void between the processes of legitimation and legitimacy itself, Edvard Beneš lost his government and, ultimately, lost himself.



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