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German-Benelux Relations 1919-1940

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GERMAN-BENELUX RELATIONS

1919 - 1940

(TITLE)

BY

James Thomas West

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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INTRODUCTION

World War I was fought to end all wars and bring everlasting peace and stability to the world. However, the final defeat of the Central Powers and the subsequent treaties not only made the future European scene unstable, it also made a future conflict unavoidable. Germany, suffering under the brunt of these treaties, was also labeled with the responsibility of the war, and this fact had profound effects in its future relations with other European nations. The outcome of the world war was the remaking of Europe. It destroyed old empires such as the Hapsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire and brought new states into existence. But, the basic problem which supposedly led to hostilities in 1914 still had not been settled. This was the problem of Germany. Germany's equal position in international affairs was refused by the victors, and repercussions of this refusal were to lead the European states into another raging struggle for domination of the continent.

The ensuing treaties which resulted from the world war contained many harsh provisions, and German consent to them was given grudgingly and unwillingly after long debate whether it

would not be better to refuse to sign.¹ Consent was finally given because of the weakness of the German army, the exhaustion of the German people, and the pressure of the Allied blockade, not from any conviction that the terms were just or even tolerable. The only asset which Germany acquired was that the treaties could work only with the co-operation of the German Government.²

Fundamentally the Treaty of Versailles contained basic objectives designed to implement a stable and complacent European continent. The frontiers of Europe were to be drawn on the basis of nationality; every nationality was to be given independence; minorities were to be protected; democracy was to be the basis of government; conscription was to be abolished among the enemy powers as the first step towards its abolition everywhere; and discrimination in the matter of railway and river rates was to be forbidden.

Not only did the treaty affect Germany's future political relations in the international community, it also had great consequence in their economic relations.

The war meant a loss of wealth and manpower, the severance of international commercial ties, and a disruption of established political

¹S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy: A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965), p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 71.

social, and economic patterns. The Treaty of Versailles demanded the surrender of the merchant fleet, rolling stock, European territories, and colonies. It established a supervision of domestic and international political and economic relations, and exacted, under duress, the promise to pay, in addition to the gold and goods sacrifice at the close of the war, a part of future income as reparations.³

In the immediate situation of 1919 the peace treaty seemed crushing and vindictive; but in a longer perspective, the most important thing about the treaty was that it was concluded with a united Germany. The defeated nation had only to secure a modification of the treaty, or shake it off altogether, and she would emerge as strong, or almost as strong, as she had been in 1914. This was the decisive, fateful outcome of the armistice and the peace treaty. The "German problem" was left unsolved. Indeed it was ultimately more acute.

From its start the peace treaty lacked moral validity. It had to be enforced; it did not, as it were, enforce itself. In regard to Germany's attitude, no German accepted the treaty as a fair settlement between equals "without victors or vanquished." At the first convenient moment they meant to rid

³Allen Thomas Bonnell, German Control Over International Economic Relations, 1930 - 1937 ("Illinois Studies In The Social Sciences," vol. XXVI; Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1937), p. 13. For a justification of the Versailles Treaty see Alfred L. Rowse's Appeasement: A Study In Political Decline or Harold C. Nicolson's Diaries and Letters (2 vols.).

their nation of all or at least part of the treaty. Thus, the main objective of German foreign policy after World War I was to throw off the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and to re-establish Germany as an "equal" in all aspects of international relations.

The internal situation in Germany at the end of the war was one of chaos. They had suffered under wartime shortages and the ravages of war, and they were confronted with the almost insurmountable task of paying the Allied reparations. With the Allied blockade and extreme shortages at home, the German people believed reparations to be the sole source of their problems. This attitude was soon associated with the peace treaty in general, and served to increase their incessant desire to remove themselves from its limitations.

The war-guilt clause was also a matter which touched the hearts of all Germans.⁴ Forced into accepting responsibility for the war, they felt that they had been chained with an unjust curse of world damnation. This clause, along with other aspects of the peace treaty was to become the rallying post for all nationalistic tendencies in Germany. This nationalism was a rampant romanticism, with its emphasis on blood and race, its

⁴Halperin, p. 141.

glorification of the past, and its call for individual heroism and sacrifice. In the late 1930's German intellectuals were to interpret World War I not as Germany's responsibility, but the responsibility of forces beyond which the German nation had any control.

...in German official opinion the issues of the war of 1914 were fundamental, cutting across pre-existing philosophies and outlooks and dividing the peoples of the modern world into antagonistic cultural groups dedicated to different concepts of supreme life-values. Germany, as the chief protagonist of the old dynastic warrior people of Central Europe, had never accepted the premises of capitalistic democracy and its implications of anarchic individualism. Although implemented with all the might of theoretical science and industrial technology, she had dedicated her immense power to the defense of pure Germanism against the challenge of the modern spirit, with its illegal lawlessness, its enervating egoism, and its moral degradation. Germany accepted the technology of Capitalism, never its spiritual dynamics. Hence the anachronism of German militarism in 1914....the subordination of the industrial to the instincts of an ancient warrior folk which had been romanticized and exalted by generations of poets and thinkers. The loss of the war meant to Germany the collapse of supreme moral values, the dissolution of her organic being.⁵

The "German problem" loomed large on the European scene after the world war, and had it been settled, World War II might

⁵Leon W. Fuller, "The War of 1914 as Interpreted by German Intellectuals", The Journal of Modern History, XIV (June, 1942), p. 162.

not have been. However, it did remain unsettled thereby creating an ominous atmosphere over Europe. Germany strove to settle the problem herself and to reclaim her position on an international level. Her foreign policy was directed to this end and its effect was to reverberate throughout Europe and the world. Germany's post-war struggle was to be long and arduous. On November 14, 1918, in a letter to a friend, Walther Rathenau wrote:

The events appear to me in the form of the following picture: It is necessary to climb a steep cliff. We had ascended up to an appreciable height; then appeared the deep cleft which stood in the way of further ascent. Now we must descend to the valley in order to begin anew with difficulty the ascent up the road which this time, however, will lead to the top.⁶

Belgium

At the end of the war Belgium was faced with one of the most crucial decisions in its short history as an independent nation. The German invasion and occupation had not only left her devastated and in ruins, but it had also revealed the weakness of Belgium's traditional foreign policy of neutrality. The German violation of Belgium's territory during the war was a breach of international law which even the German Chancellor,

⁶Walter Rathenau, Briefe (2 vols., 2nd ed.: Dresden: 1927) II, 75. cited in Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization (2nd ed.; New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966), p. 422.

Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, admitted.

The wrong - I speak frankly - the wrong we thereby commit, we will try to make good as soon as our military aims have been attained.⁷

During the war many Germans felt that annexation of Belgium was necessary in order to insure that Belgium would never again be used as a base of operations against Germany. It was suggested that all Belgian forces, all transportation facilities, and all means of communication remain under German control. In addition, Belgium was to be required to give up her army - the resulting savings of money to be used for the maintenance of Germany's occupational forces, Belgium's sovereignty would have to be limited in that Belgium could not be allowed to follow an independent foreign policy, and all internal matters were to be subject to German scrutiny.⁸

In the economic sphere Belgium was required to become a non-voting member of the German customs union, her railways and waterways were closely integrated with those of Germany, Germany's monetary system was extended to Belgium, and the Belgians were submitted to German taxation and social legislation.⁹ The destruction of industries in Belgium through confiscation

⁷Hans W. Gatzke, Germany's Drive To The West (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1930), p. 8.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

of vital materials, the liquidation of industrial enterprises, and their transfer into German hands was necessary, General Erich von Ludendorff pointed out, in order to create a faits accomplis for the postwar period.¹⁰ The enforcement of these measures was designed to break the spirit of the Belgian people; however, the German policy only served to unite resistance and to make the tiny state a martyr in the eyes of the world.

The violation of Belgium's neutrality was justified by Germany's insistence that Belgium had forfeited her pre-war neutrality when she entered into military discussions with Great Britain. But whatever justification was given for the German action, behind it lay the necessity of a quick and decisive German blow at France. In other words, it was essential, from the German point of view, to knock France out of the war as quickly as possible. Belgium stood between the two warring nations, and neutral or not, her location forced her inescapably into the conflict.

With the conclusion of hostilities in 1918 Belgium was a scathed but determined nation. She had suffered through years of war and occupation which had weakened her material existence; however, her spiritual being was strengthened through the long

¹⁰Ibid., p. 266.

period of hardship. At the end of the war, the Belgian people emerged with a determination to rebuild and re-establish Belgium to her post-war prosperity. On June 29, 1919, shortly after the signing of the peace treaties, King Albert sent a letter to his Prime Minister, M. Delacroix, stating:

The hour has come for an immense and combined effort from all.
 Everyone must develop a consciousness of his duties of discipline and solidarity towards the community....
 Let us assert before all, our will to build up a finer Belgium....
 Let us call the whole people to work and to the fulfillment of civic duty. The government appreciates its responsibilities, Parliament is ready to co-operate in the task...
 ...I am whole-heartedly with all Belgian citizens at the moment when they are preparing themselves for the great work of peace and restoration.¹¹

Luxembourg

On August 2, 1914, the neutrality of the little Duchy of Luxembourg was violated by German troops in their operations against France. As with Belgium, it was both a physical and spiritual blow to the unsuspecting Luxemburgers. The Grand-Duchy was of strategical importance to Germany in that its railways opened a way to outflank the defenses of the Meuse valley at Verdun besides serving as a pivotal point between the

¹¹Emile Cammaerts, Albert of Belgium: Defender of Right (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935), p. 317.

armies at Lorraine and those advancing through Belgium.

The Grand-Duchy could offer little resistance to invasion in that it had been prohibited from having a military force by the Treaty of London (1867). Besides the military restrictions put on Luxembourg, the Treaty of 1867 also guaranteed the Grand-Duchy's independence and neutrality. The following year on October 17, 1868, the Luxembourg Constitution, in which the Duchy proclaimed its independence, indivisibility and permanent neutrality, was established.

The second Article of the new constitution laid the foundation for Luxembourg's future foreign policy.

The Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, within the limits determined by the act annexed to the treaties of April 19, 1839, under the guarantee of the Courts of Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia, shall henceforth form a perpetually neutral state. It shall be bound to observe the same neutrality towards all other States. The high contracting powers engage to respect the principles of neutrality stipulated by the present article. That principle is and remains placed under the sanction of the collective guarantee of the powers signing parties to the present treaty, with the exception of Belgium, which is itself a neutral State.¹²

Luxembourg had been created as a Grand-Duchy and placed under the administration of the Netherlands by the Congress of

¹²Luxembourg and the German Invasion Before and After: The Luxembourg Grey Book (London: Hutchinson & Company LTD., 1942), p. 27.

Vienna in 1815. However it was simultaneously placed within the German Confederation. As a result of its part in the revolts of 1830, the Grand-Duchy was partitioned, its western, French-speaking section becoming a province of an independent Belgium. This solution was confirmed by the Treaty of London on April 19, 1839, with King William of the Netherlands retaining the grand ducal title. Lacking economic ties with the Netherlands, Luxembourg entered the German Zollverein in 1842. Even though Luxembourg's independence was guaranteed by the Treaty of 1867, the grand ducal crown remained with the House of Nassau (Netherlands). The personal union with the Netherlands was severed, however, in 1890, when William III died and Wilhelmina accended the Dutch throne. In accordance with the Nassau Succession Agreement (1783), the Grand-Duchy then passed to another branch of the Nassau line, Grand Duke Adolphus becoming sovereign.¹³ Upon his death in 1905, his son William reigned until 1912 and was succeeded by his daughter, Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide, who repeatedly expressed pro-German sympathies during the world war. However, the Grand Ducal Government maintained a strict neutral attitude during the German occupation until the Armistice of 1918.

¹³Great Britain Naval Intelligence Division, Luxembourg ("Geographical Handbook Series", Vol. XV; Cambridge: University Press, 1944), p. 74.

At the end of the war, Luxembourg emerged with a fairly sound economic and political foundation as compared to Belgium. This was due primarily to three reasons: (1) prohibited from having any military force by the treaty of 1867, Luxembourg was in no position to offer any real military resistance to the German invasion, thus sparing her from the ravages of war; (2) by maintaining strict neutrality during the occupation, and (3) the pro-German sympathies of the Grand Duchess. Undoubtedly there was some destruction within the Grand-Duchy but not on the scale as in Belgium.

Both Belgium and Luxembourg had pursued a policy of neutrality prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1914; yet both states experienced violation of this guaranteed status. What result was the world war to have on the future foreign policies of Belgium and Luxembourg? Could neutrality still be valid as an international principle? Or would some other arrangement have to be made in order to insure the security and independence of the two small European states? These questions were the main concern of both Belgium and Luxembourg at Versailles, and their answers were to be the dominating factors in Belgian and Luxembourg foreign policy between the two world wars.

The Netherlands

Unlike both Belgium and Luxembourg, the neutral state of the Netherlands was not subjugated to the sufferings of

invasion during the world war. However, due to her geographical position, Dutch policy was a subject of great interest among her neighbors. When war broke out in 1914 the Netherlands was in a difficult situation. She was surrounded by belligerent states with war operations taking place just beyond her borders. Thus, maintaining her neutrality was a perilous, yet eventually successful endeavor.

The success of the Dutch policy can be attributed to four considerations: (1) the impartiality with which she conducted herself towards the belligerent states; (2) a strong determination, backed by full mobilization of her army and navy during the war, to resist any serious violation of her neutrality; (3) the fact that German military strategists had deemed it unnecessary for the German thrust to pass through Holland, and (4) Dutch neutrality which was essential due to her channels through which Germany received urgently needed imports.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands was a creation of the Congress of Vienna; it consisted of Belgium, or southern Netherlands, and was to serve as a buffer state on the continent. Great Britain had much influence in this creation since it was essential to British security that no hostile or potentially hostile European power control the coast opposite the

Thames estuary. On the other hand, the Netherlands was favorable to this arrangement in that Dutch interests were chiefly overseas and existed largely dependent upon British good will for their protection.

After the Belgium uprising of 1830 and the resulting separation of Belgium from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Holland found herself playing a smaller role in European affairs. Her role as a strong buffer state was gone and in its place was devised the "perpetual neutralization" of Belgium, guaranteed by the five Great Powers. Reduced to a small-class power and forced to take a back seat in European affairs, Holland did not play any further major role in the course of events leading up to the world war.

Although not directly involved in the world war, Holland was indirectly effected by the confrontation. Basically a state which prospered through the free international exchange of goods, the Allied blockade produced a slow strangulation of trade which created the threat of a paralysis affecting every branch of economic life. Full mobilization of the armed forces helped absorb many of the unemployed, but the financial situation caused by this mobilization was itself a serious problem.

For Holland the basic solution to her problems was the end of hostilities. With her internal economic structure



Fig. 1 _____ Holland and Belgium in 1831-39.

largely intact, she had only to revive its operation after the Armistice. Followed by the lifting of the Allied blockade, she could also, for the most part, resume normal operations of her commercial activities. In comparison to Belgium and Luxembourg, the Netherlands had fared very well. Her neutrality had been respected by the opposing groups of powers and she had been spared the terrible experience of war on her own territory. Neutrality had served the Netherlands well; therefore there was no need for the small nation to consider any revision of its foreign policy.

The future seemed hopeful and bright for the Netherlands, but it was to soon face an immediate and unexpected problem with a close neighbor -- Belgium. The ensuing difficulty was to grow out of Belgium's revision of her traditional foreign policy and resulted in the weakening of what should have been a close association between the two small European states. Immediately after the Armistice Belgo-Dutch relations were very favorable. At a dinner on January 16, 1919, King Albert of Belgium spoke to the members of a Netherlands commission in Brussels.

Inheritors of the glory of the ancient low Countries, equally rich in artistic treasures, Holland and Belgium are united by intellectual

and economic ties which date from the early times of their history and will operate to bind them closer in the future. The public and private life of the two peoples is founded on a love of liberty, zealous labor and commercial honesty. The geographic situations of the two States make them, so to speak, a unit, and it is difficult to see how one of them could keep its freedom if the other became enslaved. My compatriots fully understand this ~~community~~ community of interests, created by nature, and their ardent desire is to see the Kingdom of the Netherlands develop daily in power and prosperity.¹⁴

¹⁴Amry Vandenbosch, Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815: A Study In Small Power Politics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), p. 247.

Fig. 2 _____ The Benelux States in 1929



CHAPTER I

THE QUEST FOR SECURITY

Kaiser Wilhelm II's abdication of the Crown of Prussia and the associated rights to the German Imperial Crown on November 28, 1918, represented the final step in the dissolution of Bismark's German Empire.¹ Prior to his abdication, the Empire in all actuality had already ceased to exist. With chaos running rampant throughout all the German states, the radical wing of the Social Democrats, led by Dr. Karl Liebknecht, attempted to establish a Soviet Republic. However, the more moderate wing of the Social Democrats, led by Friedrich Ebert and Philip Scheidemann, proclaimed the German (or Weimar) Republic on November 9, 1918. It was hoped that the formation of a government on a democratic basis would ensure Germany of a better bargaining position during the peace talks, but this hope was soon shattered.

The Allied terms were severe, to say the least. The newly formed German Government protested vehemently but to no

¹Sidney B. Fay, Germany, Vol. XVIII of The History of Nations, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Company, 1928), p. 490.

avail. Finally, on June 23, 1919, the German Republic, realizing its desperate situation accepted the Allied terms, even "those provisions in the treaty which, without having any material significance, are designed to deprive the German people of their honor."² The following week, on June 28, the peace treaty was officially signed at Versailles.

The young Weimar Republic was dealt a staggering blow at Versailles. Whereas the victors could have utilized their powers to strengthen the roots of democracy in Germany, they instead made the Republic's position infinitely more difficult. They failed to visualise the fact that the future peace and security of Europe was dependent on the consolidation of democracy in Germany. As it turned out, the Weimar Government was shackled with the stigma of signing a disgraceful treaty. The nationalists and reactionaries were therefore given a rallying point with which to attack the very forces that strove to fulfill the Allied terms. The future was indeed bleak.

Then began the long series of humiliations from abroad, the shameful episodes of the reparations demands, the unbridled domination of foreign armies of occupation on the Rhine and in the areas subject to referendum, the overbearing attacks of the military commissions on the sovereign rights of the Reich, the whole

²Halperin, p. 152.

carefully worked out system of degradation to which a disarmed nation, though unbeaten in the field, was subjected.³

In the immediate situation, Germany had no choice but to follow a policy of fulfillment in regard to the Treaty of Versailles. It was a foreign policy reluctantly carried out, while at the same time every effort was made to hinder its enforcement. Basically, Germany was a revisionist state struggling against the western European powers who had only one idea--to perpetuate the power of Versailles. To the old enemies in the West (Britain, Belgium, and France), new ones were artificially created and added in the East and the South--above all Poland and Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the beginning of the post-war period witnessed Germany in the center of Europe surrounded by neighbors whose foreign policies were essentially tied to the Treaty of Versailles and who were determined that a strong Germany would never again threaten European stability. On the other hand, Germany's foreign policy developed as an anti-thesis to the existing conditions and could not have been otherwise.

Luxembourg

The liberation of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg was

³S. Erckner, Hitler's Conspiracy Against Peace, trans. Emile Burns (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937), p. 197-198.

Immediately followed by the forced abdication of Adelaide in January of 1919 because of her Germanophile policies during the war; she was succeeded by her sister Charlotte. As Luxembourg had taken no actual part in the war, it had no part in the negotiations and deliberations leading to the peace treaties. Once normal conditions were restored in the Grand-Duchy, the grand ducal government sought to decide upon its political and economic future. On May 1, 1919, after a mass meeting of the people, an appeal was sent to the Paris Peace Conference insisting that the Grand-Duchy:

...upon the integral application of the principles proclaimed by the Entente, demand their place in the League of Nations and maintain their right to dispose freely of their political and economic future through a referendum to the whole people.⁴

At Versailles the Allied Powers forced Germany to renounce all the benefits deriving from its former agreements with the Grand-Duchy in respect of the customs union. Article XL went on to state:

Germany accepts the Abrogation of the state of neutrality of the Grand-Duchy and adheres beforehand to all the international arrangements concluded by the Allies and Associated Powers concerning the Grand Duchy.⁵

Both France and Belgium had ambitions in regard to Luxembourg's future. France concerned herself with a possible

⁴The New York Times, May 1, 1919, p. 9.

⁵Luxembourg And The German Invasion..., p. 29.

economic union whereas Belgium considered a political arrangement. The Peace Conference hoped that the conflict of interests between Belgium and France would be resolved, and the referendum was delayed with that possibility in mind. In September of 1919 when the plebiscite finally did take place, an overwhelming majority of the people elected to remain under the reigning dynasty and to enter an economic union with France.⁶ As a result of the vote, Belgium broke off its economic relations with Luxembourg on October 3, and recalled its minister. Belgian opinion was expressed in the National Belge which stated: "France...counts on making Luxembourg an advanced nation again, a step which it is unlikely Germany would ever take."⁷

France's foreign policy was based on the idea of encircling Germany with a ring of non-revisionist states. Through a system of alliances and financial support, France hoped to maintain the status quo in Europe by ensuring that Germany would never again rise as a major continental power. France was engaged in negotiations with Belgium to conclude a possible military agreement, and in order to assure a successful arrangement France decided to forego the economic union with Luxembourg.

⁶Great Britain Naval Intelligence Division, p. 251.

⁷NYT, October 4, 1919, p. 1.

Luxembourg then had no other course but to conclude an economic agreement with Belgium. On December 16, 1920, a fifty year pact was reached which provided for a single Belgo-Luxembourg customs unit and for the use of Belgian currency in the Grand-Duchy. The same month, Luxembourg was unanimously voted into the League of Nations.

Within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Luxembourg pursued a policy of neutrality. As a small state with virtually no armed forces at its disposal, the Grand Duchy looked to the League as the basis of its foreign policy. There existed at this time some doubt as to Luxembourg's international status of neutrality. The Grand-Duchy continued to assume that the Treaty of 1867 was still in force, except as regards Germany. France was prepared to give guarantees if England would do likewise; however, Britain felt that Luxembourg's neutrality had terminated with her entry into the League of Nations. As a result, Luxembourg's territorial integrity no longer had the unqualified support of the Powers; therefore, the Grand-Duchy followed a rigid policy of neutrality in the hope of justifying her claim to an international guarantee.

The two decades following the signing of the peace treaty witnessed Luxembourg playing no role of major significance in the realm of international affairs. She was too small to think

in terms of revising her traditional policy of neutrality; so she continually expressed her adherence to its principle. The grand ducal government worked within the League to achieve international peace and stability and was usually associated with the other small states in efforts to bring about peaceful reconciliation of international disputes.

Belgium

The foreign policy of Belgium underwent a complete revision as a result of the world war and the subsequent treaties. The failure of her traditional policy of neutrality meant for Belgium that some other means would have to be found to insure her independence and integrity. The natural solution, from the Belgian point of view, was to seek safety in territorial gains and foreign alliances.

During the war there had been a press campaign for the "rectification" of her Dutch frontiers. The object of this campaign was the annexation of Dutch Limburg (or at least part of it), and that part of Dutch territory which laid to the south of the Scheldt River, known as Zeeland Flanders. A distance of only fifty miles separated the southern tip of the Dutch Limburg frontier and the northern frontier of Luxembourg. After the war, Belgian annexationists argued that without sovereignty over lower Dutch Limburg, Belgium could not build an effective

defense system against possible attack from Germany.

To obtain "rectification" of boundaries from defeated Germany did not seem to be an insurmountable task. But to request the cession of territory from a friendly neighboring state which had remained neutral during the war presented a delicate diplomatic situation. On February 11, 1919, the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul Hymans, presented his government's case to the Paris Peace Conference.

Belgium's argument was that the Treaties of 1839 were not a result of free negotiations between Belgium and the Netherlands but were instead imposed upon the two states by the Great Powers. And, as only France and Great Britain had fulfilled their obligations, Belgium had the right to demand revision of the Belgo-Dutch Treaty of 1839.⁸ Foreign Minister Hymans went on to suggest that the Netherlands be compensated by annexation of Prussian Guelderland, Eastern Frisia, and the county of Bentheims. Belgium's view was summed up by the Minister of Interior, Baron De Borchgrave.

It is of the utmost importance for the world's peace that a country so exposed to invasion as Belgium should command the situation and be made difficult to

⁸NYT, March 15, 1919, p. 1. See Appendix I.

attack. We are convinced that the great powers will examine with sympathy and justice the cause of a nation which sacrificed itself in order to remain faithful to its engagements.⁹

At the Conference, the British delegation felt that they had no power to force a friendly and neutral state to cede any part of its territory, whereas the French supported the Belgian position since a strong Belgium was in France's interest.

The Netherlands were naturally disturbed by these developments which put an appreciable strain on Belgo-Dutch relations. From Paris on March 4, Dr. John Loudon who had served as the Foreign Minister of Holland during the war stated:

It is highly regrettable that the Belgian press has taken a hostile attitude toward Holland. I cannot believe this attitude interprets the feelings of a million Belgians who found refuge on Dutch soil in 1914.¹⁰

What irritated the Dutch Government most was that Belgium presented its demands at Paris without first notifying the Netherlands of its desires and intentions. The Dutch felt that the Great Powers had no right to interfere in the problem, but Holland did send Foreign Minister van Karnebeek to Paris on May 19 where he refuted all of Belgium's claims and allegations.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ NYT, March 5, 1919, p. 8.

He did however state that his government was willing to discuss with Belgium a possible revision of the Treaty of 1839 but only on the condition that territorial status would not be disturbed. On June 4, 1919, the Allied and Associated Powers rejected Belgium's claims but at the same time requested that the parties of the dispute negotiate a new treaty.

Belgium's failure to secure territorial gains from the Netherlands in order to strengthen the Belgian frontier caused Belgium to demand a military alliance or at least co-operative defense planning between the two army staffs. The Netherlands, however, rejected this proposal on the grounds of her neutrality. Therefore, Belgium was forced to look elsewhere for a possible military alliance, the natural partner in such a pact being France.

At Paris, meanwhile, the Treaty of Versailles was being presented in its final form for signatures. Belgium indicated its dissatisfaction with the treaty by refusing to sign and claiming that it denied what was due to Belgium. The Belgian newspaper Le Soir stated that as long as the treaty did not contain necessary conditions for the speedy restoration of Belgium by financial measures and assurances of diplomatic support for demands vital to Belgian security, it was the duty

of the government to reject the treaty.¹¹ The difficulty was finally resolved with Belgium receiving certain financial concessions and possession of the provinces of Eupen and Malmedy which had been assigned to Prussia in 1815 as part of a compensation for Prussia's renunciation of claims on Saxony. Belgium also obtained full title to the contested portion of Moresnet and the western part of Prussian Moresnet.¹² King Albert reacted to the final draft by stating: "What would you have? They did what they could."¹³

As a signatory of the treaty and the gainer of territory from Germany, Belgium realized that she was now a target of revisionist Germany. Belgium looked to the League of Nations for security, but she feared that it might prove ineffective. Therefore, she turned to alliances and attempted to shape her foreign policy like that of France and England.¹⁴ In an interview in October of 1921 King Albert remarked:

Above all ... we must hope for the continuance of the intimate union between France and England which is sealed by their common trials. Belgium, for her part, will remain faithful to her great brothers in arms and always work, within the limits of her power,

¹¹ NYT, May 6, 1919, p. 1.

¹² A. Randle Elliott, "The Oslo States and the European War", Foreign Policy Reports, XV (January, 1940), p. 260.

¹³ Cannmaerts, p. 325.

¹⁴ NYT, December 7, 1919, p. 7.

to strengthen the bond of union between the two nations which guarantee peace.¹⁵

Discussions were begun between France and Belgium regarding a military alliance, and on June 15, 1920, the two Chiefs of Staff, Marshal Foch of France and General Maglinse of Belgium, began military conversations which led to the signing of a military pact on September 7, 1920.¹⁶ Belgium also attempted to negotiate an agreement with Great Britain to balance the French arrangement. British military authorities gave it serious consideration, but they finally rejected the idea since British public opinion was opposed to foreign alliances.

The following year, on June 12, 1921, Belgium reached an agreement with Luxembourg in which Belgium became the Grand-Duchy's protector. According to the terms reached, all customs formalities between Belgium and Luxembourg were abolished and in the future, whenever Luxembourg was not represented by its own consular agent, Luxembourg's interests would be placed in the hands of Belgium's consular officers. Almost all of Luxembourg's currency was replaced with Belgian currency, and

¹⁵Cammaerts, p. 334.

¹⁶Arthur H. Furnia, The Diplomacy of Appeasement? Anglo-French Relations and the Prelude to World War II (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 243.

Luxembourg was granted a loan of 175,000,000 francs from a Belgian financial group. They also agreed upon the consolidation of their railroad systems under a single administration. Finally, a Supreme Council composed of five members was established to control the various organizations created and was to act as a liaison between the two governments in execution of the agreement.¹⁷

The Netherlands

After Kaiser Wilhelm II's abdication in November of 1918 he had fled Germany and taken refuge in the Netherlands. The Allied and Associated Powers demanded the ex-Kaiser's surrender, but the Netherlands refused and based their action on the Dutch policy of neutrality. The Dutch failure to extradite the ex-Kaiser made the Netherlands unpopular with the Entente, and it was in this atmosphere of tension that Belgium pressed its claim for the cession of Dutch territory to Belgium. Belgium hoped to take advantage of the situation and possibly gain support from the Great Powers for her position on the matter.

Immediately after the war, Holland experienced a brief stimulation of her commercial activity. But it was soon apparent

¹⁷League of Nations Treaty Series: Publication of Treaties and International Engagements Registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations, Vol. IX, No. 256 (205 vols.; London: Harrison & Sons, LTD., 1922), p. 223-245.



Fig. 3 _____ Belgian Gains in 1919

that the long years of war had weakened both her agricultural and trade base. Her agriculture was faced with overseas competition, and her trade was dependent upon a Europe devastated by war. In other words, Holland's prosperity was in direct proportion to Central and Western European economic activity.

Prior to 1920, Dutch foreign policy was characteristically passive due to her traditional neutrality. Not being a party to the world war, the Dutch took no active part in the Peace Conference at Paris, and continued to follow her old line. However, an important change in Dutch foreign policy took place in 1920 when the Netherlands was admitted to the League of Nations. By assuming membership in the world organization, the Dutch modified their traditional neutrality and tended towards the policy of collective enforcement. Within the Netherlands, the "idealists" were strong opponents to this change of policy, and as a result, Dutch participation in League affairs was often a cautious endeavor. As with Belgium, the Netherlands looked to the League of Nations as the harbinger of peace in Europe and in the World. Indeed, a nation whose whole economic structure was supported by trade was dependent upon international peace for its prosperity. Most of her foreign policy was to be carried out through the League, and along with the other small European states Holland worked for the peaceful

solution of all international disputes.

As Europe approached the 1920's there was a feeling of optimism on the part of many European governments. The world war had been brought to a successful conclusion from the Allied point of view, Germany lay prostrate and posed no immediate threat to the status quo, and the League of Nations was launched with the expectation of establishing an "ideal" framework within which all future problems between states would be dealt with in a peaceful manner.

Before the war, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands had all followed a policy of neutrality in the realm of international affairs. Two of these states, Belgium and Luxembourg, had seen their neutrality violated in 1914 and now, at the end of the war, re-evaluated their international position. Luxembourg was too small to completely revise her foreign policy; but she did form closer economic ties with Belgium while at the same time she put her faith in the League of Nations. Belgium turned away from her traditional policy and sought protection not only in the League but also through a system of alliances. The failure of her neutrality in 1914 had cost the Belgians dearly and they were determined that the same experience would not be repeated. In face of German revisionism, an untested League, and British avoidance of entangling alliances, Belgium

turned to France, the strongest nation in Europe possessed with the aspiration of perpetuating Versailles.

The Netherlands presented a slightly different picture. Neutrality had saved the Dutch nation from the horrors of the world war. Since neutrality had served her in the past, there was no reason to doubt its future validity. Under this consideration, Holland continued to pursue her policy of neutrality with one important exception--her entrance into the League of Nations. But this modification was due more to Dutch interest in world peace for economic reasons than from any desperate attempt to insure her future independence and integrity.

In 1919 Luxembourg had no real choice. Her only hope was with neutrality. The Netherlands, for the most part, continued to rely on neutrality as a feasible policy, while Belgium discarded neutrality in favor of a system of alliances and territorial gains. The outcome of the foreign policies of these three states was to prove the success or failure of neutrality as a valid international concept.

CHAPTER II

THE PERIOD OF FULFILLMENT

Germany, with her open boundaries and her location in the heart of Europe, has always taken her geographical condition into consideration in developing her foreign policy. It is precisely this central location that is chiefly responsible for the disasters that have been so frequent in her history. The historical obstacle in the growth of the German nation had repeatedly been France, whose basis of foreign policy was the principle that no strong power could be allowed to emerge in Central Europe. In accordance with this principle, France had always been opposed to any attempt at the creation of a united Germany.

The only natural frontiers that Germany had were the Alps in the South, and the North Sea and the Baltic Sea to the North. Otherwise, she was faced with France in the West, and Poland and Czechoslovakia (also Russia in the past) in the East. Under these geographical conditions, her western and eastern

borders were her main concern. She was ideally located as the natural bridge between the East and the West, but as Erich F. L. Rock-Weser, former German Vice-Chancellor, stated in 1930:

...Germany must become neither England's mercenary in her battle against Bolshevism, nor Russia's accomplice against the Western powers. Germany must discover a political formula which makes her a desirable partner for the one, as well as for the other.¹

The Weimar Republic was faced with many problems, both on the domestic and foreign level. During its first eighteen months of existence, its foreign policy was characterized by petulant nationalist sabotage of Allied policies and demands. The nationalists were not the only threat to the young Republic's international endeavors. The socialists were also extreme in their demands and criticisms of the government. All the existing parties, moderates and extremists, had the same goal--only the means were different. Both the socialists and the nationalists had the same ultimate objectives: to nullify the Paris treaties, to rectify the eastern borders, to end Allied occupation and reparations, to regain Germany's lost military power, to remove Germany as an "object" of Entente policy and give the Reich free determination of its own policy, and to regain Germany's

¹Erich F. L. Rock-Weser, Germany in the Post-War Period (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, Inc., 1930) p. 147.

position as a great power in Europe.²

Britain, in avoiding military pacts in the period immediately following the war, pursued a policy of "insular isolation" which was revisionist almost from the start. She preferred to see a rapid recovery of Germany in order to ensure a stable Europe. France, on the other hand, had suffered and lost much during the world war and considered the Versailles Treaty as its only source of future security. It was along these lines that the French government of Raymond Poincare followed a policy of strict adherence to the peace treaties.

The German policy of fulfillment was initiated on May 10, 1921, with the accession of Joseph Wirth as Chancellor. He replaced Konstantin Fehrenbach who resigned on May 4 to protest the reparation bill which had been set at 132 billion gold marks by the Reparation Commission on April 27. It was the position of Wirth's government that resistance to the Allied demands was fruitless, and that Germany's only recourse was to carry them out as best possible. In the Reichstag on July 7, 1921, Walter Rathenau, who was in charge of the Ministry for Reconstruction, declared:

We Germans are obligated by our own

²Pinson, p. 423.

signature, by the honor of our name that we have placed under the treaties. We will fulfill and we will go to the limit of our ability in order to preserve the honor of our name, which stands affixed to the treaties, and we recognize their binding character even though they do not express our wishes.³

This policy was later continued by Gustav Stresemann and Wilhelm Marx after a short disruption of it by the Cuno government from 1922 to 1923.

It was in January of 1922 that the German Foreign Ministry was discussing the advantages of an eastern as opposed to a western orientation of the Republic's foreign policy, a debate which had existed ever since Versailles in 1919. For the most part, the moderates favored a western orientation whereas the left-wing radicals, a large proportion of the nationalists, and some important military figures demanded a rapprochement with Soviet Russia.⁴ General Hans von Seeckt, who headed the advocates of an eastern policy, pointed out that another war with France was inevitable, whereas in the east, Russia and Germany had a common aim: the extinction of Poland and the restoration of the frontiers of 1914. Russia was a potential ally and the Republic could help develop their industries as a source for

³Walther Rathenau, Gesammelte Reden (Berlin, 1924), p. 211, cited by Pinson, p. 429.

⁴Halperin, p. 207.

future German war material. But the most important common denominator was the desired destruction of Poland.

As early as August of 1918, the possibility of future economic and military agreements between Soviet Russia and Germany had been discussed by Adolf Joffe, Soviet Ambassador to Berlin, and a group of Germans which included even Gustav Stresemann.⁵ By 1921, firm contact had been established between the Reichswehr and Moscow. On May 6, 1921, Russian-German relations were furthered by the signing of a German-Russian Commercial Agreement.

In April of the following year, Wirth and Rathenau went to Genoa to attend an international economic conference. On the sixteenth, in nearby Rapallo, they concluded a treaty of friendship with Georgy Chicherine, the Soviet Foreign Minister. By this agreement the two contracting parties agreed to re-establish normal diplomatic and consular relations, they agreed to a mutual renunciation of reparation claims, and Germany consented to waive indemnification for losses sustained by German subjects as a result of the abolition of private property in Russia. The pact was strengthened by the appointment of bitterly anti-French Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau as German Ambassador to the

⁵E. J. Passant, A Short History of Germany (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), p. 165. Stresemann was the leader of the German People's Party at this time and later Chancellor in 1923.

Soviet Union.⁶

The Allied Powers' first reaction to the treaty was one of anger and fear. Most Germans, however, viewed the pact favorably and hoped that Germany's bargaining position with the Allied Powers would thereby be improved. Unknown to all governments, Germany and Russia shortly thereafter concluded a secret treaty which was of great significance in the development of the German and Russian armies. The agreement was not signed on the governmental level, and it allowed German officers to gain experience in Russia; in return, Russia received a stipulated sum annually and the Russian Army was to be trained by German experts.

In 1922 Germany faced a serious international crisis resulting from her failure in meeting reparation payments. The German Government had managed to carry on the nation's economic structure during the previous few years through foreign loans and other arrangements. For example, in July of 1921, the Republic had negotiated a 40,000,000 gold marke loan from Holland.⁷

The Netherlands had more than just a passing interest in making a loan to Germany. An economically sound and

⁶Ibid., p. 167.

⁷NYT, July 23, 1921, p. 3.

prosperous Germany was essential to Dutch commercial activity. Lying at the mouths of the Rhine, Meuse, and Scheldt rivers and connected by a system of canals, much of Germany's commerce passed through Dutch outlets such as Rotterdam. Prior to the world war, trade relations between the Netherlands and Germany had been close, and the collapse of the German economy following the Reich's defeat was a serious blow to Dutch commerce. Therefore, Holland desired a quick restoration of German economic power in order to further Dutch trading interests.

Belgium was also interested in German commercial activity due to the Belgian port at Antwerp and to its claim of reparations. However, the Belgians were more cautious in their view towards a recovered Germany. Belgium's official attitude in regards to Germany can best be exemplified by reference to a proposed Anglo-Belgian treaty in the first months of 1922. The treaty was never actually concluded because of Belgium's complaint that "it is not specifically directed against Germany, but can be evoked against any possible violation of the integrity of Belgian territory."⁸ From the Belgian point of view, the proposed conditions would constitute Belgium as equivalent

⁸Viscount D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, Vol. I: Versailles to Rapallo, 1920-1922 (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, & Company, Inc., 1930), p. 260.

to a British protectorate rather than give her the protection she desired.

The economic situation in Germany had become so critical that in July of 1922 the German Government requested a two-year moratorium of its reparation payments in order to avoid a financial crash. The following August, the Allies met in London to discuss the matter. Great Britain, Italy, and even Belgium supported the German position, but France refused to yield. In November a new Reich cabinet was formed by Wilhelm Cuno, an economic expert, in hopes of remedying the problem and improving relations with France. But France was reluctant to accept any German overture due to the recent development at Rapallo. As the dispute was not resolved, France claimed that Germany had defaulted on her reparation payments, and Franco-Belgian troops moved into the Ruhr on January 11, 1923.

With active resistance to the new development out of the question for a disarmed Germany, the German Government pursued a policy of passive resistance and declared that there could be no settlement of the controversy until the Ruhr had been evacuated. France refused and as a result Cuno resigned on August 12, 1923. Gustave Stresemann replaced Cuno, but he failed to alleviate the financial situation and was followed by Wilhelm Marx in November of 1923.

As Belgium relied on France for the protection of Belgian independence and territorial integrity, the small nation had to support the French move into the Ruhr. Premier Thaumis stated on April 16, 1923:

Belgium is resolved to remain by the side of France in the Ruhr until complete satisfaction of Belgium's just claims has been obtained.⁹

The Dutch, as could be expected, took an unfavorable attitude towards the whole episode. Belgium's attempt to appropriate Dutch territory at the end of the world war had not been forgotten, and regardless of French and Belgian assurances that the rights of the Netherlands would be respected, the Dutch Government became increasingly skeptical as French and Belgian troops moved nearer to the Dutch frontier. Everywhere in Holland mass meetings were held to protest the Ruhr occupation. The Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant referred to the Franco-Belgian action as "an unlawful occupation of the Rhine front in time of peace for reasons of strategic safety."¹⁰

Reparations being the crux of the problem, an international committee of experts was appointed by the Reparation Commission to resolve the difficulty. Headed by Charles G. Dawes, the well-

⁹NYT, April 17, 1923, p. 2. See Appendix II.

¹⁰NYT, February 28, 1923, p. 3.

known financier, the committee met on January 21, 1924, and recommended the restoration of full economic and fiscal sovereignty to Germany. At the time of this recommendation, the situation was temporarily being handled through the MICUM (Mission Interalliee de Controle des Usines et Mines) treaty between the Ruhr industrialists and the occupational authorities. It had been signed on November 23, 1923, and provided for a temporary regulation of reparations until April 5, 1924.¹¹ Germany gave an affirmative answer to the Dawes report, and the "Dawes plan", as it became known, was declared to be in operation on September 1, 1924; followed by the withdrawal of French and Belgian troops from the Ruhr. Belgium, however, made it clear that she expected Germany to fulfill her obligations. On January 1, 1924, King Albert declared:

Regulation of the reparation question... is indispensable for the reestablishment of our economic equilibrium. The legitimacy of reparations has been recognized by the whole world, including Germany herself.¹²

A step towards improvement of German-Belgian relations was taken on April 4, 1925, with the conclusion of the German-Belgian Trade Accord. The agreement was based on the favored

¹¹ Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., Stresemann and the Politics of the Weimar Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 120.

¹² NYT, January 2, 1924, p. 19.

nation principle and affected particularly German trade in the Belgium Congo and Belgian mandated territories.

The same month, a new agreement between Belgium and the Netherlands for the regulation of the question of the Scheldt was reached. On May 22, 1926, France, Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands signed a protocol registering the termination of the Treaties of 1839. The Belgian parliament approved a new treaty in July, but in the Netherlands it was bitterly opposed by a group who felt it threatened Dutch national interests. On October 29, 1926, it passed the Second Chamber by the narrow margin of fifty to forty-seven, but only by the firm and eloquent defense of the treaty by Foreign Minister Van Karnebeck.¹³ However, on March 24, 1927, the First Chamber defeated it by a vote of thirty-three to seventeen.¹⁴ As a result, Belgo-Dutch relations reached their lowest point during the period between the two world wars. A majority of the Dutch desired good relations with Belgium, but Holland disliked the Franco-Belgo alliance and feared that through an arrangement with Belgium, the Netherlands might become involved in the age-old conflict between France and Germany.

¹³Vandenbosch, p. 264.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 265.

One of the most important steps taken by the nations of Europe during this period was the Conference of European Nations held at Locarno, Switzerland. Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia took part in the proceedings. These nations collectively guaranteed the maintenance of the territorial status quo resulting from the Treaty of Versailles and that differences between the signatories which could not be settled by diplomatic means were to be referred to either an arbitral tribunal or to the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague.

The Geneva Protocol of 1924 had called for the outlawing of aggression, but prior to the Locarno Conference its fate was still in suspense. On March 9, 1925, Foreign Minister Paul Hymans of Belgium stated his nation's position:

Ever since the Armistice I have shown that an entente of the western powers was indispensable in order to secure a stable and peaceful Europe. The security of Belgium is to the common interest of France and Britain. The idea of a western pact has gained ground. The problem of security is today solemnly posed before the conscience of the nations and whatever difficulties it involves, none can escape. The idea is under way and it is impossible it should not end in a solution being found.¹⁵

¹⁵ NYT, March 9, 1925, p. 5.

The Locarno Treaties were signed on October 16, 1925, and according to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Locarno stood for security and peace in Europe. It foreshadowed no hostile designs against anyone."¹⁶ Even more, Locarno signified the creation of a new psychological atmosphere in Europe, and new international conditions in general. It represented an attempt to arrive at a moral disarmament, a new moral consolidation, and also political and economic consolidation. Locarno was a hope for the future.

The Locarno Treaties were hailed in Belgium and on January 21, 1926, the Belgian Chamber of Deputies adopted the pact by a vote of 124 to four with four abstentions.¹⁷ For Belgium, the new treaty diminished the risk of German aggression by a detailed and extensive arbitration convention providing for the settlement of all non-political questions. Also important was the recognition by all the Powers concerned of territorial status quo and the inviolability of the frontier separating France and Belgium from Germany.

In Germany the German signature to the Locarno pact brought on a cabinet crisis, and Dr. Hans Luther who had replaced Marx in December of 1924, was forced to resign because of

¹⁶Halperin, p. 338.

¹⁷NYT, January 22, 1926, p. 5.

nationalist opposition to the Government's entering into any agreement that would fetter her from regaining in the future, by any means, territory she claimed rightfully belonged to her. When no other cabinet could be formed, Dr. Luther returned to his former post and received a vote of confidence on January 27, 1926. In September, Germany was admitted to the League of Nations.

As in the previous few years, Gustav Stresemann was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Earlier in his life, Stresemann had been an outspoken and committed nationalist, but he later recognized Germany's perilous situation and supported the policy of fulfillment. During the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, Stresemann ended the policy of passive resistance and, as a result, was assailed by the patriotic press. He replied:

I am prepared and happy...to take my stand before any tribunal to defend what I have done....Giving up passive resistance is perhaps more patriotic than the phrases with which it is combated. I knew when I did it... that I was putting my own political position in my party--yes, even my life--in jeopardy. But what is it that we Germans lack? We lack the courage to take responsibility.¹⁸

As Foreign Minister, Stresemann aimed his policy at breaking the encirclement of Germany by securing the friendship of England and, if possible, of France. This he considered essential in

¹⁸Martin Gohring, Stresemann, Mensch, Staatsmann, Europaer: Gedenkrede, gehalten am 8. Juli 1956 (Mainz: 1956), sp. 19f., cited in Gordon A. Graig, From Bismark to Adenauer: Aspects Of German Statecraft (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1958), p. 72.

order to effect the evacuation of the Rhineland at the earliest possible date, and to achieve a reasonable and final settlement of the reparations problem. Only when these aims had been achieved, and only when Germany had resumed her place in the councils of Europe could the problems of revision of the eastern frontier be approached with any hope of success. In working towards these objectives, Stresemann had three natural and valuable gifts. He had the ability to sense danger and to avoid it by seizing and retaining the initiative; he could maintain his perspective and his sense of values in the midst of a changing diplomatic situation; and finally, he was more stubborn than his partners in negotiations and he refused to allow their importunities to force him to accept second-best solutions.¹⁹

From the end of the world war until 1924, France was governed by a rightist party which followed a strong-hand policy in regards to Germany. The government of Raymond Poincare considered the maintenance of the peace settlement the anchor of her security program; she retained her armaments, manipulated the League of Nations, and strove to preserve intact the victorious coalition of the war. The French also strove to create an elaborate alliance system in Central Eastern Europe, thus

¹⁹Graig, p. 74.

the formation in 1921-22 of the Little Entente between Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to prevent the restoration of the Hapsburgs in Hungary and Austria, and to insure strict compliance by Hungary of the Treaty of Trianon. Besides the Franco-Belgo treaty of 1920, the French also signed a military agreement with Poland on February 19 of the same year. On January 25, 1924, France and Czechoslovakia concluded a pact to concert upon measures relating to their security and the peace treaties and to consult in case Germany and Austria tried to consummate the Anschluss or in case monarchist restorations were attempted in Hungary and in the Reich.

In the French elections of May 1924, a new leftist government under Aristide Briand was put into office. This new government brought in a period of conciliation in regards to Germany. However, France concluded another pact in June of 1926 with Romania to consult with each other in case of unprovoked attack and to submit all disputes to arbitration. In November of the next year a similar agreement was reached with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Even as German-French relations were beginning to improve, France still clung to her policy of alliances for security.

Prior to the world depression relations among most of the European nations were improving. In May of 1926 Germany and

the Netherlands entered into negotiations for a pact against war. Holland was always available for any type of arrangement which would be in the interests of international peace. Belgium, which was having extreme financial difficulties in 1925, was contacted by the German Government through the President of the Reichsbank with an offer to help revalorize the millards of worthless German marks left in Belgium by the German Army of Occupation.²⁰ Belgium quickly rejected the offer since the proposal also called for the return of Eupen and Malmédy as compensation to Germany. The economic situation worsened and finally on July 13, 1926, Premier Jaspar asked the Chamber to give King Albert an extension of power for six months in order to deal with the problem. In December of 1927 the Belgian Government began studying the possibility of decreasing the size of the Belgian army due to the financial crisis, but Premier Jaspar reiterated that the Government would continue to work for international pacification conducted by previous Governments under the auspices of the League of Nations and in the spirit of the Locarno agreements.²¹

Foreign relations between Belgium and Germany were still

²⁰NYT, July 24, 1926, p. 3.

²¹NYT, December 1, 1927, p. 2.

not at their best. On February 16, 1927, the Belgian Defense Minister, M. de Broqueville, disclosed in the Chamber of Deputies, that Germany was spending huge sums of money on rebuilding her army. As if a voice from the future, he stated:

I warn you that the German war theory now, as before the war, involves swift attack and the occupation of a large portion of Belgium. The war tomorrow will above all be one of industry and chemicals.

Belgium today is completely open to invasion and her situation is very much more critical than in 1914.²²

A further strain in German-Belgian relations occurred in May of 1928, when Germany refused to build two mail boats for the Ostend-Dover service as part of the Reich's reparation payments. Germany claimed it was too busy at the time building her own commercial fleet.²³

Belgian-Dutch relations were dealt a severe blow in February of 1929 by the publication in the Utrechtsch Dagblad (a leading Dutch provincial newspaper) of alleged provisions in a secret Franco-Belgian military treaty signed in 1920. The interpretation of the treaty presented in the newspaper referred to Holland and the possibility of war operations on Dutch

²²NYT, February 17, 1927, p. 5.

²³NYT, May 20, 1928, p. 2.

territory. Both France and Belgium denied such a provision and General Gallet, Chief of the Belgian General Staff, remarked: "I should like to state categorically that the document is a forgery from beginning to end."²⁴

In Germany there was an indignant reaction to the treaty incident. Baron von Fretag-Loringhofen, a member of the Reichstag used the opportunity to attack Stresemann's conciliatory foreign policy.

Dr. Stresemann expects us to sit down quietly...with people who have conspired only lately for a violent attack on our country, while little Holland, likewise threatened, bravely demands explanations..

.
Dr. Stresemann talks before the party caucus, fights for a great coalition and fights for his portfolio, but he does not fight for Germany's position in the world nor for Germany's security. On those subjects he keeps silent, because he would have to confess the utter bankruptcy of his policy.²⁵

On the domestic scene, the Reich enjoyed a period of comparative recovery and prosperity from 1924 to 1928. This improvement had been brought about by foreign loans which not only served to create an illusion of prosperity, but also made it possible for the Reich to meet and transfer reparation payments.

²⁴ NYT, March 3, 1929, p.9.

²⁵ NYT, March 1, 1929, p. 8.

An election on May 20, 1928, resulted in a substantial victory for the Social Democrats and a setback for the rightists.

At this time, an attempt was made to revise the Dawes Plan. From the German point of view, its principle shortcoming was its failure to set the total reparation bill. Therefore, in September of 1928, representatives of France, Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, and Italy met at Geneva to discuss the problem. The League Council met at Lugano, Switzerland, in December of the same year and chose Owen D. Young of the United States to head a committee of experts in searching for a final solution. Finally, on June 7, 1929, Germany accepted the "Young Plan" which called for her to make payments over a period of fifty-nine years.

Belgium had been highly critical of the negotiations which took place at Lugano. The proposed plan called for a reduction in Belgium's reparation claims from \$114,000,000 to \$64,000,000.²⁶ Belgium and Germany argued out their differences concerning the worthless German money left in Belgium in 1918, and the German Government announced its willingness to make a monetary refund but requested some sort of political or territorial compensation. The Belgians refused to listen to any talk of

²⁶NYT, May 9, 1929, p. 4.

revision. The Reich then offered to settle in return for two ports of call to serve as German coaling stations. Belgium also balked at this proposal.

Emile Francqui, the chief Belgian delegate, was besieged by the other representatives with promises of future justice if only he would make concessions. Referring to the promises made to Belgium ever since 1919, Francqui said, "...I have now come to prefer cash to promises."²⁷ The problem was finally resolved, however, by promising Belgium that until the Belgian claim was settled, the Young system of payments would not enter into operation.

Another important agreement under consideration in 1928 and 1929 was the General Act for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes which called for the renunciation of war as an instrument of international politics. Basically, the agreement provided (1) that each pair of signatories should set up a permanent conciliation commission; (2) prescribed the submission of all legal disputes to the Permanent Court of International Justice whose decision was binding; (3) prescribed the submission of non-legal disputes to a committee of arbitrators; and (4) provided that members of the League of Nations

²⁷ NYT, May 17, 1927, p. 3.

could subscribe to one or more chapters of the Act and could make reservations excluding particular categories of disputes from those to be dealt with under the Act. Belgium accepted the Act in its entirety whereas Holland subscribed only to the first two points.

Germany's international situation improved greatly during the 1920's. However, a general dissatisfaction with the course of events existed in the thoughts of some Germans. In 1929, Otto Hoetzsch, a member of the Reichstag, wrote:

The German Reich is today Janus-headed. It is still a defeated and a fettered state, which does not possess its sovereignty in full measure and is not a peer among peers; and yet, as regards European politics, people make of it a Great Power, a peer among peers, working with the other states in restoring order to European affairs, and for that purpose an essential unit. Thus we are faced with this strange paradox of a Great Power which is not a Great Power.²⁸

As Germany passed into what was to be the concluding years of the Weimar Republic, its foreign policy was still fundamentally the same--to rid the Reich of the Treaty of Versailles, to regain her lost territories, and to achieve the status of an international power. The policy of fulfillment was only a means

²⁸ Otto Hoetzsch, Germany's Domestic and Foreign Policies (London: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 73.

to this end and had, for the most part, proved a failure. The immediate aim of Germany was the evacuation of the Rhineland and the Saar; but along with these two areas considered of great economic and strategic importance by Germany there could have been added Eupen and Malmedy.

The taking of Eupen-Malmedy was unmitigated robbery and must be revoked.²⁹

²⁹Koch-Weser, p. 212.

CHAPTER III

THE DEPRESSION AND THE RISE OF HITLER

As early as the beginning of 1929 Germany began to feel the impact of serious economic difficulties. Belgium and Holland faced the same situation, but their colonies helped cushion the blow of world wide depression. However, as trading nations they still suffered under the general economic collapse. Their commercial relations with Germany in 1928 were of special concern to the Lowland states since 3.8 per cent of Belgium's import trade and 4.1 per cent of her export trade was with the Reich, whereas Holland had 5.1 per cent and 9.8 per cent respectively.¹ More than two billion guilders, invested in Dutch loans to Germany, were blocked and virtually lost. When Germany was forced to put restrictions on the transfer of money to foreign countries in 1931, the backbone of the Dutch economic life was broken.

Economic nationalism was an offspring of a distorted

¹James W. Angell, The Recovery of Germany (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 403.

political nationalism, and its growth, stimulated by the depression, impeded the course of international co-operation. Tariff barriers, quotas, recourse to the barter system, currency and credit restrictions, and the collapse of the gold standard all contributed to the awakening of economic nationalism in the late 1920's and early 1930's. As a result, the smaller states of Europe decided to take the initiative and met in Oslo, Sweden, in December of 1930. On December 22 the Oslo Convention which provided for an economic entente with Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg was concluded. Finland joined the group in 1933. The Convention was basically a policy of co-operation with other states for restoring the balance of economic and political power, preventing the gradual absorption of small nations by their stronger neighbors, and averting possible conflicts. For the Netherlands and Luxembourg it represented a chance to improve the international economic and political situation while still following a rigid impartiality. For Belgium, however, it was an important reversal of her post-war Francophile policy.²

Due to the hostility of the Great Powers, the Oslo Convention proved rather ineffective in regards to curbing the rise

²Elliot, Foreign Policy Reports, XV, No. 21, p. 260.

of economic nationalism. On June 20, 1932, King Albert of Belgium, in a letter to his Prime Minister M. Renkin, wrote:

It has thus been definitely proved that no country is able, by itself, to alter in its favor the course of economic evolution. A concerted action of the States towards international solidarity can alone cure the grave evils from which the world is suffering.... It seems to me that Belgium should not hesitate to take the initiative which circumstances require, and to secure to this end the help of the States which, like our country, feel keenly the necessity of a change in economic policy.³

The very next day it was announced that the three governments of Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland would form an economic union to help allievate the European economic situation. The meeting had taken place in Ouchy, a suburb of Lausanne, Switzerland, and the resulting Convention of Ouchy provided for a reduction of tariffs between the three Lowland states.⁴ However, Great Britain later insisted on benefiting from these tariff reductions because of her most-favored-nation agreements and this demand practically nullified the Convention.

In Germany, Heinrich Bruening replaced Mueller as Chancellor on March 30, 1930. On April 1 he presented the three

³Cammaerts, p. 330-331. See Appendix III.

⁴NYT, June 21, 1932, p. 5.

main objectives of his government's diplomacy: (1) loyal fulfillment of existing agreements; (2) clarification and development of Germany's relations with those states that were friendly to her, and (3) encouragement of international co-operation, especially in the economic field, in order to alleviate Germany's material hardships. Bruening "was determined to brook no interference on the part of the Reichstag as he put his program into effect; and he favored government by decree before that expedient had proved to be necessary."⁵

The swift deterioration of the country's economic situation meanwhile led President Hindenburg and Chancellor Bruening to put a financial program into effect by means of emergency decrees on July 16, 1930. For the first time since the founding of the Republic, the principle of ministerial responsibility had been violated. The Presidential election of May 13, 1932, strengthened the position of the rightist elements, especially the Nazis. As a result, Bruening was asked to resign and Colonel Franz von Papen, a fifty-year old aristocrat became the new Chancellor on May 31.

On the international scene an important conference opened

⁵Graig, p. 85.

in Lausanne, Switzerland, on June 16, 1932. The Von Papen Government demanded complete cancellation of reparation payments. France wanted the Young Plan formally continued but admitted that the payments would have to be drastically reduced. It was at this same meeting that the Convention of Ouchy was negotiated. On July 9 a compromise was reached by which the creditor states agreed to discard the Young Plan in return for a promise by Germany to pay three billion gold marks into a general fund for European reconstruction. Thus the Lausanne settlement became the last in the series of Allied recessions from the claims originally made upon Germany.

In the elections of July 31, 1932, the Nazis captured 230 seats in the Reichstag, making them the single largest group even though they failed to get a majority. The following November 17 Von Papen resigned and was succeeded by General Kurt von Schleicher who lasted until January 28, 1933. Von Schleicher's view of the Nazis was fairly well expressed in a letter to the new Chancellor from Major von Fumetti.

However, if the National Socialist movement were judged only by its nebulous aims, its dubious programme, and its inferior leaders, a devastating judgement would have to be reached. But even so, the fact cannot be denied that eleven million German voters demonstrate in their dark longing a strong national will to live, and for this end seek new forms. To me it appears the most important task of future statecraft to find

these forms and to capture the ideas of the movement for the state. Only a personality with complete intellectual freedom will be able to achieve this. Hence I am convinced that you, Herr General, whom I admire so much, will master this difficult task with a firm hand...⁶

An historic conference took place between Adolf Hitler and President Hindenburg on January 4, 1933, and ended with a rapproachment between the two men. At noon on January 30, 1933, Hindenburg administered the oath of office to the new and last Chancellor of the Weimar Republic.

German-Belgium relations during the last years of the Republic were strained in some instances. In 1929, Belgium was striving to become the future site for the Bank of International Settlements in order to establish an international institution on Belgian territory as a possible deterrent to future invasion by another state. In November of that year, the Belgian Government protested that the German delegates blocked a favorable vote to Belgium by political arguments.⁷ The bank was eventually set up at Basal and Belgium withdrew her protest but an unamiable atmosphere remained.

In March of 1931 Belgium protested against a vote taken

⁶Major Von Fumetti to Schleicher, Munich 5 April 1932: Nachlab Schleicher, No. 63, Bundesarchiv Koblenz. cited in F. L. Carsten, The Reichswehr and Politics: 1918 to 1933 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 367.

⁷NYT, November 11, 1929, p. 6.

in the Reichstag urging the German Government to seize any opportunity of bringing back into the Reich the provinces of Eupen and Melmady.⁸ Foreign Minister Hymans declared that the Belgium Government had no intention of agreeing to any discussion on Belgian frontiers or territory. The Belgium Government was well aware of the German attitude in regards to Eupen and Melmady and was prepared to deal with any attempt to return them to the Reich. The Reichstag vote only served as another warning of what was to come. The matter came up again on October 4, 1932, when the Belgium Government sent a note to the Reich Government protesting against German demonstrations at Krefelt against Belgian control of the Melmady region.⁹ Germany claimed that the referendum to determine Melmady's future after the world war had been unfair. Belgium, in turn, denied the German allegation and reiterated that the vote had been approved by the League of Nations and that the question could not be re-opened.

In the latter part of 1930 Belgian foreign policy came under attack in the Chamber of Deputies. Led by Emile Vandervelde, socialist leader and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, a campaign was begun for the revision of the Franco-Belgo pact of

⁸NYT, March 25, 1931, p. 11.

⁹NYT, October 6, 1932, p. 8.

1920.¹⁰ Ever since its signing, many Belgians feared it would make Belgium a vassal of French policy. Vandervelde felt that the Locarno agreements made the pact unnecessary and that the pact was not in the interest of international disarmament which his party supported.

France was naturally alarmed at the development in Belgium, but across the channel, British opinion reacted favorably since they believed an independent Belgium was less likely to be dragged into a conflict between France and Germany. For the French, this was the first time that one of the integral parts of its alliance system was beginning to look towards a more independent foreign policy.

The Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies in January of 1931 reported that Belgium's foreign policy was explicitly defined in the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Locarno Treaties, the Kellogg Pact and other international arrangements concluded since the war. The report continued, "These treaties assure Belgium her traditional rights under guarantee of Britain and France, with an additional guarantee by Italy."¹¹ The Commission concluded that the Franco-Belgo

¹⁰ NYT, December 29, 1930, p. 1.

¹¹ NYT, January 20, 1931, p. 17.

pact did not in any way jeopardize Belgian international policy and supported its continuance.

After the failure of negotiations between Belgium and the Netherlands over their territorial dispute in 1926 and 1927, semi-official delegations of the two countries continued to meet in secret. However, the Dutch parliament got wind of the proceedings and called Foreign Minister Beelaerts van Blokland to issue. This resulted in all negotiations concerning the treaty being broken off in April of 1932. Otherwise, Belgian-Dutch relations improved in the early part of the 1930's.

Belgium began to fear that the Locarno Treaties might not give it all the security she desired; and with the League of Nations exhibiting weakness in regards to the Far East situation, the Belgians began to lean more towards France. The rise of Hitler and the internal weakness of France during these years did not give Belgium much assurance. In 1933 Kherchove, the Belgian Minister to Germany, informed the United States Ambassador to Berlin, William E. Dodd, that Belgium must always rely on Britain's support rather than that of France.¹²

The change in the relations of the two Lowland states

¹²William E. Dodd & Martha Dodd (ed.), Ambassador Dodd's Diary, 1933-38 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1941), p. 35.

came first in commercial relations as witnessed by the Oslo Convention and the Convention of Ouchy. Whereas both were faced with an increasingly difficult situation in Europe, the Netherlands also had to consider the grave crisis in the Far East. In the past she had relied on Great Britain to maintain the status quo in the East Indies, but the recent turn of events there indicated a radical change in Dutch policy.

Under these conditions it was little wonder that the Netherlands strongly supported the Disarmament Conference in 1932. At Geneva on February 15, 1932, Foreign Minister Van Flokland recalled the Hague's failures of the past in regards to disarmament.

Now the mere existence of the League of Nations, the Permanent Court of International Justice, the pact of Paris and the Convention for Financial Assistance give us far greater guarantees of security than we had then.¹³

Four months after Hitler's accession to power in Germany, the Reich concluded an economic agreement with Holland on May 10, 1933. Holland resented Germany's quota restrictions of previous years, but the new agreement gave remarkable scope to the quota idea. It gave Holland duty concession on agricultural products and the Dutch could scarcely protest since they themselves had made use of quotas in past economic pacts.¹⁴

¹³NYT, February 16, 1932, p. 8.

¹⁴Bonnell, p. 87.

When Hitler took office in January of 1933 Germany's foreign policy was going through a transitional period. During the twenties, this policy was dominated by attempts to settle the reparations problem; now it was beginning to be concerned with Germany's international position.

It is really no easy matter to conduct German foreign policy today. But its goal should not be left in doubt; it is the restoration of Germany as a ¹⁵ ~~Might State.~~

Within the League of Nations Germany strove to accomplish this objective, but was blocked by the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty had called for the disarmament of Germany, and realizing that they could never rearm while surrounded by the French system of alliances, the Weimar Republic attacked the Versailles Treaty through the issue of disarmament. On September 12, 1931, Julius Curtius, German Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed the League Assembly.

The counterpart of the obligations assumed by Germany in 1919 is a formal undertaking on the part of the other states that disarmament by Germany should be simply a prelude to general disarmament by the other Powers. German disarmament was to be the first step in a scheme of general disarmament. Twelve years have elapsed since then, and Germany

¹⁵ General von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1930), p. 153.

has been a Member of the League for five years, without that undertaking having been fulfilled.¹⁶

Knowing that the other European states would never agree on a general disarmament, the essence of the German strategy was to gain support for the rearmament of the Reich.

Nazi foreign policy resumed threads of German Weltpolitik under Wilhelm II, but magnified it greatly. It was marked by a dynamic expansionism which was rationalized by the need for "living space." In Mein Kampf, Hitler had written that the National Socialist Party:

...must take up the struggle against the aimless and incompetence which have hitherto guided our German nation in the line of foreign affairs. Then, without consideration of 'tradition' and prejudices, it must find the courage to gather our people and their strength for an advance along the road that will lead this people from its present restricted living space to new land and soil, and hence also free it from the danger of vanishing from the earth or of serving others as a slave nation.¹⁷

For a thousand years the Germans had been driving to the East, sometimes peacefully and sometimes behind a bloody

¹⁶League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement #93, p. 33. cited in James W. Gantenbein (ed.) Documentary Background of World War II, 1931 to 1941 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 613.

¹⁷Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), p. 645-646.

sword. Hitler wrote:

The future aim of German foreign policy shall be Ostpolitik (an Eastern policy) aiming at the acquisition of necessary soil for our German nation, and not an Eastern or Western orientation.¹⁸

This was the old Drang nach Osten policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Hitler was clear in his statement of future policy.

We stop the endless movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-war period and shift to the soil policy of the future.¹⁹

The main objective of Nazi foreign policy was the creation of a great German Reich which would bring within its fold all the provinces of the Prusso-German empire lost at Versailles. But first the Treaty of Versailles had to be torn to shreds and the rearmament of Germany completed. Hitler's Reich could have no meaning unless Austria was included, nor could the achievement of the greater German program be begun without the encirclement or destruction of Czechoslovakia. Besides Austria and the German population of Czechoslovakia, the greater Germany was to include the German populace of

¹⁸Zoltan M. Szaz, Germany's Eastern Frontier's (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), p. 73.

¹⁹Hitler, p. 654.

Poland and Belgium.²⁰

According to Hitler there were few, if any, states in Europe that had not enriched itself territorially at Germany's or her allies' expense. Under these conditions the Reich could expect some difficulty in finding any worthwhile ally on the continent. Thus it was necessary for the Nazi party to direct the energies of the German people towards the strengthening of the state. The German military machine had to be rebuilt.

No State...would want to ally itself with present-day Germany, which can give no military help; hence the immediate object of German foreign policy must be transformation of the nation into a strongly armed military state. Oppressed peoples ...are never freed and unified in a common empire by means of flaming protests, but through a sharp, unsheathed sword. The forging of this sword and the securing of military allies is the task of the leaders of its foreign policy.²¹

During his first few months of office, Hitler shrank from multilateral obligations, from treaties and pacts in which he would have had to deal with a number of partners at the same time. He avoided all agreements that were backed by the guarantees of several different powers. He preferred to

²⁰Ernest Hambloch, Germany Rampant: Study in Economic Militarism (New York: Carrick & Evans, Inc., 1939) p. 195.

²¹Mildred S. Weitheimer, Germany Under Hitler (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1935), p. 40.

negotiate with only one partner at a time. His aim was bilateral treaties, the fulfillment of which he would have to argue about with only one lone contracting party. He had no intention of working towards a harmonious European community. On the contrary, he sought to separate every nation individually, one after the other, from this community. Hitler's whole philosophy towards foreign policy was summed up in a single sentence-- "State boundaries are made by man and changed by man."²²

The National Socialist conception recognized no interests beyond those of the individual state; it acknowledged no solidarity which might have demanded their sacrifice to those of the international community. Hitler was prepared to violate any agreement or international principle if it became absolutely necessary for the carrying out of his party's aims.

Partisan, religious, humanitarian, and all other criteria in general, are completely irrelevant.²³

²²Hitler, p. 653.

²³Ibid., p. 609.

CHAPTER IV

PROLOGUE TO WAR

On April 1, 1933, the creation of the APA (Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP) was announced to the German press. The APA was an advisory body set up at the suggestion of Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi party's philosopher. Its purpose, according to Rosenberg, was "to make the German people aware that foreign policy is not a matter for a small caste, but the concern of the entire nation."¹ Its more immediate tasks consisted of entertaining foreign visitors, observing foreign developments, and maintaining surveillance of various personalities. The lack of funds caused its eventual demise, but it was only the beginning of a complete system of organizations to be created for the purpose of maintaining strict governmental control over the Reich and an awareness of activities in other nations.

Besides having a part in the creation of the APA, Alfred Rosenberg also developed what became known as the "Rosenburg plan." According to this conception, the new Nazi state

¹Volk Beo, April 4, 1933 cited in Paul Seabury, The Wilhelm-strasse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 34.

existed only as a provisional or transitional stage to another higher conception: the Germanic Union, the combination of all Germanic peoples. The plan demanded:

...the disintegration of Belgium, the Germanic, Flemish part of which, together with Brabant and Luxembourg, is, as in the case of Switzerland, to be separated from the French Walloon part. It makes Flanders and Holland, the old German Burgundy, the North-Western part of the racial empire.²

In Belgium, W. Hermans and a Van Severen transformed the old Flemish movement into a purely Nazi organization called the Flemish National Solidarists (Dietsche Nationale Solidaristen).³ Referred to as "Dinasos"; they wore Swastikas, sang Nazi songs, decried Jewery, demanded the abolition of parliament, wore standardized uniforms, and maintained their own military organization. Another organization formed by a Dr. Borms and called the "Council of Flanders" strove for a Flemish uprising against the Belgian Government. Its slogan was, "Back to Germany, back to the Germanic race! Hitler as a new Emperor Charlemagne."⁴

For the most part, Nazi activity in Belgium was of little notice prior to 1935 when the Rexist party emerged to national

²Ernst Henri, Hitler Over Europe (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1934), p. 129-130.

³Ibid., p. 148.

⁴Ibid., p. 150.

attention. In August of 1933 a conference was called in Veiviers, near the border because of objections that German tourists often sang German Hymns when passing through Eupen and Malmedy.⁵ For the time being, the Belgian Government only saw to it that police surveillance was increased.

On the international scene the year 1933 was rather uneventful as regards Belgium since her basic concern was the improvement of her financial condition. However, there was still great concern over her foreign policy. Albert Devese, Belgian Minister of War, on October 11 requested an increase in military expenditures. The request came as a result of the Belgian people's reaction to Hitler's policies. The Minister of War felt that in spite of Belgium's financial difficulties, she could no longer postpone work on her defensive system. In December, the Belgium Senate responded by voting (80 to 59) 759 million francs (about \$158,390,000) in extra-ordinary credits for fortifications along her eastern borders.⁶

Belgium was gravely concerned about the evident weakness of her ally France and was becoming generally disillusioned about the possibility of maintaining peace in Europe. The

⁵NYT, August 27, 1933, p. 15.

⁶NYT, December 13, 1933, p. 18.

Belgian Count Andre de Kherchove discussed the matter in Berlin with Ambassador Dodd of the United States in January of 1934.

He emphasized the dangers to his country, its close reliance upon England and the atrocities of the German occupation. He agreed there is a lot of talk about a "preventive war" in French official circles, fearing this would mean general war.⁷

Under the cloak of making Germany self-sufficient, Hitler began carrying out an international economic policy designed to build up a huge German trading deficit. In this way, the Reich received essential goods and at the same time made her creditors dependent upon her in some respects. Holland was one of the first states to resist this policy and began exercising strict controls over her imports to Germany:

...so as to keep them from running out of hand and creating debts that every Dutchman knew the Germans would never be able or willing to meet.⁸

To counteract the decline in trade with Germany, Holland turned more to Great Britain.

Nazi activity in 1933 was a much greater problem to the Netherlands than to Belgium. In the Dutch province of Limburg,

⁷Dodd, p. 74.

⁸Adriaan Barnouw, The Making of Modern Holland: A Short History (New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1944), p. 207.

the Nazis found fertile ground for recruits among the many German mine workers in that area. Near the German-Dutch frontier at Herzogenrath, the Nazi leader Van Waterland asserted that five hundred German storm troops were ready to aid the Dutch Nazis in taking Limburg.⁹ On July 13 the Dutch Justice Ministry took action and ordered that all foreign propagandists be expelled from Holland.

A large majority of the Dutch living in the Limburg province viewed the situation unfavorably and on August 16 when the National Socialist Netherlands Labor Party held meetings there, many of the German Nazis who had attended had to have police escorts on their return to the border.¹⁰ The disorders caused by the Nazi activity finally forced authorities to forbid the wearing of brown shirts or Nazi emblems by those crossing the Dutch-German border into Holland. Concern became so great that on December 29, 1933, the Dutch Government issued a decree forbidding state employees from being affiliated with the National Socialist movement in Holland.¹¹

The Netherlands Government wished, as far as possible, to maintain good relations with the Reich. When the municipality

⁹NYT, July 11, 1933, p. 12.

¹⁰NYT, August 17, 1933, p. 11.

¹¹NYT, December 30, 1933, p. 5.

of Vandam proclaimed a boycott on German goods at the end of 1933, the Government decreed that this action was illegal since Germany was a friendly nation.¹² The Government also requested the curbing of posters attacking Hitler since they were not calculated to assure better Dutch-German relations.

There existed in Holland several National Socialist organizations. The largest was led by Anton von Mussert. The National Socialist Netherlands Worker's Party was directed by Major von Kruyt and the party's program left no doubt as to its orientation.¹³ Periodicals and newspapers were also a potent Nazi weapon. There was The Netherlands National Socialist which usually dealt with racial theories, the Nachrichtenblatt de Niederlande which handled official communiques of the NSDAP and propaganda material, the Deutsche Wochenzeitung fuer die Niederlande, and The German in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. By the summer of 1934, due to Nazi policies in Germany, the Dutch movement experienced a decline in membership from 30,000 to about 18,000.

Irregardless of the National Socialist movement in Holland, the Dutch and German Governments continued to foster

¹²Ibid.

¹³World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, The Brown Network: The Activities of Nazis in Foreign Countries (New York: Knight Publication, Inc., 1936), p. 140-141. See Appendix IV.

favorable relations. On September 22, 1934, a trade agreement on transfer payments was successfully concluded. According to the pact, trade payments between Germany and Holland were to be made in the future exclusively through clearing accounts.¹⁴ It also provided protection of Dutch transit trade. However, in consequence of difficulties which the agreement caused to Dutch export trade, the Netherlands Government notified the Reich Government on November 3, 1934, that the accord would be terminated in two weeks.

Belgium was in the center of a circle bounded by Great Britain, France and Germany, and exposed to the dangers inherent to her geographical situation. Its iron and steel made it one of the most important manufacturing centers in Europe. These factors, along with the development of a martial spirit in Germany, caused the Belgians much concern over their future and were always considered in evolving their foreign policy. No state feared the rearmament of Germany more.¹⁵

The nationality question was always a problem in Belgian foreign policy. Approximately one half of the population was Flemish who were inclined towards peace and hostile towards

¹⁴ NYT, September 23, 1934, p. 17.

¹⁵ NYT, February 25, 1934, Sect. VIII p. 3.

any policy which might drag Belgium into the French orbit. The Walloons, on the other hand, looked towards an eventual customs union with France and also advocated a common organization of defense on the eastern frontier. Not only did this internal division hinder the development of foreign policy, it also gave the fascists grounds of discontent with which to attack Belgium's internal stability. When Albert I was killed in a mountain climbing accident in 1934 and was succeeded by Leopold III, many Belgians were already thinking in terms of revising their foreign policy.

In London during April of 1934, military planners were concerned over the possibility of Dutch air space being used in a future German air attack on England. The German-Dutch frontier was included in the Locarno Treaties and this gap caused some concern. Great Britain suggested the creation of a neutral air zone over the Netherlands and Belgium. Belgium was included due to its geographical location. Both of the small states rejected the plan--Belgium because of her memories of pre-war neutrality and Holland because the plan imparted the idea of a restricted sovereignty. Belgium, for her part, still considered neutrality unfeasible, but at the same time she was becoming increasingly aware of the fact that France could no longer maintain herself as the "protector" of Versailles.

The French attitude towards disarmament also added to the growing split in the Franco-Belgo bond. An indication of the changing Belgian view came on May 12, 1934, when Count Poullet, a member of the Belgian cabinet said:

Neutrality for Belgium...is a necessary, first, from the viewpoint of national cohesion, and, second, from the viewpoint of the independence that small States must preserve if they are to fulfill their normal role.¹⁶

Nationalist organizations began springing up in Belgium during April of 1934. In fact, in a period of three months, such groups developed in twenty five districts. One organization which called itself the "Blue Shirts" pledged itself to rid Belgium of all political parties and the regime.¹⁷ Like its earlier German counter-part (the "Brown Shirts"), it was constantly engaged in street fights with socialists, and was organized along military lines. A bill banning the wearing of uniforms except those of government services was introduced to parliament on May 15, 1934. In the galleries, the "Blue Shirts" rioted causing the session to be suspended until the nationalists were cleared out.¹⁸

The Rexist, a nationalist group of little recognition

¹⁶NYT, May 13, 1934, Sect. IV, p. 2.

¹⁷NYT, April 10, 1934, p. 14.

¹⁸NYT, May 16, 1934, p. 10.

until the end of 1935 was originally established with the purpose of "cleansing" the Catholic party from within. It adopted the name "Christus Rex" (Christ the King), but dropped "Christus" in 1935. The Rexist party's insignia consisted of a cross and a crown, and the Pays Reel was the party newspaper. At its creation, the Rexist party did not openly repudiate democracy, only economic liberalism. It did not have a uniformed militia, nor did it specifically advocate dictatorship though this was its end. Mussolini subsidized the Rexist and later put a radio station in Milan at their disposal.¹⁹

The founder of the Rexists was Leon Degrelle who drew most of his support from the Walloon sections of the country. On Hitler's orders, Degrelle negotiated a deal with M. Beclercq, the Flemish pseudo-dictator.²⁰ Although the nationalist groups in Belgium were of small size, they along with the extremist movements on the left made it difficult to maintain cabinets in the latter 1930's. The rise of fascism in Belgium was due to three elements: (1) middle-class discontent on both economic and political grounds; (2) almost universal recognition of need of reforming machinery of the state, and (3) the apparent decadence

¹⁹C. E. Black and E. C. Helmreich, Twentieth Century Europe, A History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 312.

²⁰Camille Huysmans, About Belgium (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1944), p. 39.

of traditional parties.

In January of 1935 more incidents broke out in Eupen and Malmedy due to the results of the Saar plebiscite. Nazi antagonists called for the two provinces to follow the Saar's example, and they carried small German flags inscribed, "Tomorrow it will be the turn of Eupen and Malmedy to return to the fatherland."²¹ Finally troops had to be sent in to quell the disturbances and return the situation to normalcy. Belgium realized that her position was now more precarious than ever. On August 1 in a radio speech from Paris, the Belgian Minister of War warned, "This country...should have a strong army and the means for combat and protection which are indispensable to preserve us from aggression."²² This speech reflected the changing attitude that Belgium should be prepared to act independently if necessary.

Financially, Belgium was forced to devalue its currency 28 per cent. Luxembourg, because of her commercial union with Belgium, also devalued its currency but only 10 per cent. The Grand-Duchy felt that Belgium had violated the spirit of the union by working for preferred treatment of its own iron and

²¹NYT, January 17, 1935, p. 15.

²²NYT, August 5, 1935, p. 5.

steel exports. The situation threatened to split up the union until France stepped in and negotiated a new commercial agreement between all three states. The pact was signed on April 6, 1935, and its purpose was to avoid disturbances in the commercial exchanges of all three. It was to last six months and called for measures to prevent France from being flooded with cheap goods from Belgium and Luxembourg and also for efforts to maintain Belgian and Luxembourg export prices equal to those prior to devaluation.²³

A step towards improvement of German-Belgium relations was taken on August 5, 1935, with the conclusion of a trade agreement which called for rigid clearing conditions between the two states. This was followed up on October 11 with an offer by Hitler of a non-aggression pact. In talks between Joachim Ribbentrop and Premier Van Zeeland, the German diplomat suggested that Germany might drop its claim to Eupen and Malmedy should Belgium accept a non-aggression pact. Ribbentrop reassured Van Zeeland by stating:

Germany has no enmities in the West...
but she must prepare to defend herself
in the East against the sinister plans
of Moscow, which is preparing for an

²³NYT, April 7, 1935, p. 36.

invasion of Central Europe by a
colossal air force.²⁴

However, the proposal never developed into substantial negotiations and relations were dampened on October 21 when a Liege court took Belgian citizenship away from four leaders of the Home Loyalty movement in Eupen and Malmedy on the grounds of their efforts to return the two provinces to Germany. The German reaction was one of anger. Angriff, a Nazi newspaper, declared, "Every effort at revision, however peaceful, is punished by loss of citizenship."²⁵ The Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung stated that the verdicts must create "astonishment and indignation."²⁶ On November 3 a formal protest was sent by the Reich to the Belgian Government. It is interesting to note that this was one of the first instances of an official German protest in behalf of Germans living in another country.

Conscription, which was re-introduced by the Reich in 1935, made an unfavorable impression in both Belgium and the Netherlands. As a defender of Versailles and as an occupant of former German territory, Belgium's position could easily be understood. The Netherlands, as a neutral state, foresaw no immediate danger of war but feared that the German step might

²⁴NYT, October 12, 1935, p. 10.

²⁵NYT, October 25, 1935, p. 15.

²⁶Ibid.

cause international complications. On the domestic scene, the Netherlands held its provincial elections in April of 1935, and out of 3,320,000 votes cast, the National Socialists, presenting candidates for the first time, received 264,000 votes or approximately 8 per cent of the total.²⁷ The thirty nine provincial seats awarded to the National Socialists were important in that the provincial councils elected members to the upper house.

Under the leadership of the National Socialist party, Germany made great strides towards the rebuilding of its economy in the mid-thirties. In the fall of 1934 Hitler initiated the German "New Deal." The objects of this plan were to adjust the amount of foreign exchange used for import purposes, to prevent any increase in German indebtedness to foreigners, and to base trade intercourse to various nations upon a more satisfactory foundation.²⁸

The German Government withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October of 1933 when Hitler realized that neither of these bodies would disarm the other nations nor grant Germany the right to rearm.

Inasmuch as in these circumstances the

²⁷ WWT, April 19, 1935, p. 10.

²⁸ Edmar Schacht et al., Germany Speaks (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1938), p. 285.

equality which was solemnly promised to the German people and Reich in the declaration of December, 1932, failed of realization, the new Reich's Government, as guardian of the honour and right to live of the German people, was unable to continue to take part in conferences of that sort or to continue membership in the League of Nations.²⁹

In March of 1935, he shifted German industrial effort to military production, announced the creation of an air force, and reintroduced compulsory military service. The German naval fleet was also given a top priority, but in order to retain friendly relations with Great Britain, the Reich concluded a naval treaty with England on June 18, 1935. In regards to France, one source of friction was removed with the return of the Saar to the Reich as the result of an internationally controlled plebiscite on January 13, 1935. The Polish problem was also alleviated with the signing of a German-Polish non-aggression pact in January of 1934.

In the latter part of February, 1936, Belgium began concerning herself about her future policy once the demilitarized zone (the Rhineland) had ceased to exist. Belgium realized it would only be a matter of time before this provision of the

²⁹Gantenbein, p. 644.

Versailles Treaty would also be struck down by Hitler. As events turned out, time was shorter than the Belgian Government had expected. On March 3, 1936, German troops marched unimpeded into the Rhineland. Not only did Germany's action remove one more restriction of Versailles, it was also considered by some to be a violation of the Locarno Treaties which Hitler had promised to uphold in a speech on May 21, 1935.

The present German Government will scrupulously observe any voluntarily signed treaty even if concluded before its entry into office and power... (we will)... uphold and fulfill all obligations arising out of the Locarno Treaties, so long as the other partners on their side are ready to stand by that pact....

In respecting the demilitarized zone the German Government considers its action as a contribution to the pacification of Europe.³⁰

Hitler later charged that the Reich's reason for entering the Rhineland was based on the recent military pact signed between France and Russia.³¹ However, this pact was announced before the May 21 speech.

In a Reichstag speech on March 7, 1936, the German Chancellor made new proposals for European security.

³⁰ Lindley Fraser, Germany Between Two Wars: A Study of Propaganda and War-Guilt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 102.

³¹ Cantenbein, p. 651-652. See Appendix V.

(1) The German Government declare themselves prepared to negotiate with France and Belgium for the establishment of a bilateral demilitarized zone and to assent to other proposals with regard to the extent and effects of such a zone, under the stipulation of complete parity.

(2) In order to assure the inviolability and integrity of the frontiers in the West, the German Government propose the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Germany, France, and Belgium with duration which they are prepared to fix at 25 years.

(3) The German Government desire to invite England and Italy to sign this treaty as guarantor Powers.

(4) The German Government are willing to include the Government of the Netherlands in this treaty system should the Government of the Netherlands desire it, and the other treaty partners approve....

...We proclaim now more than ever before our wish to further the cause of mutual understanding between the nations of Europe and particularly an understanding among our western nations and neighbors.³²

Belgium supported France's position of German withdrawal by stating that the Belgium Government had not signed any agreement with Russia, yet she felt that Germany had also violated Belgian rights under the Locarno agreements.³³ She also rejected the German offer of a non-aggression pact knowing that Great Britain would support her in time of need. In the Netherlands, Germany's action was considered to have violated

³² Adolf Hitler, Speech Delivered in the Reichstag March 7, 1936 (Berlin: M. Muller & Sohn R. G., 1936), p. 34-36.

³³ NYT, March 12, 1936, p. 13. See Appendix VI.

all current conceptions of international law. Characteristically, in reference to Germany's offer of a non-aggression pact, all of the leading liberal newspapers, Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant, Handelsblad, Telegraaf, and the Het Volk declared the Dutch desire to maintain strict neutrality.³⁴ However, Linberg-Stirum, Dutch Minister to Berlin, told American Ambassador Dodd in effect:

His own government is very doubtful what to do in case France succeeds in applying sanctions to Germany on account of the march into the Rhine and the German denunciation of the Locarno treaty. The economic life of the Netherlands depends very much on exports to Germany.³⁵

Shocked by the pacifism of France in regards to the German re-occupation of the Rhineland, Belgium immediately began to think in terms of reorientating her foreign policy. On March 22, 1936, Van Zeeland declared:

Belgium, like other small countries, Holland and Switzerland, must remain, perfectly neutral, but in armed neutrality. Her role must be limited to an attitude of defense.³⁶

As part of the changing Belgian policy, the government on July 1 joined Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands,

³⁴ NYT, March 11, 1936, p. 16.

³⁵ Dodd, p. 320.

³⁶ NYT, March 22, 1936, Sect. IV, p. 4.

Spain and Switzerland in a joint declaration to the League of Nations. Due to the existing international situation and the League's failure to sanction Italy's action in Ethiopia, these smaller European states tendered cancellation of their obligations under Article XVI of the Covenant.³⁷ On July 21 the new Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul Henry Spaak, announced that Belgium desired to pursue a "realistic" foreign policy--one "exclusively and completely Belgian." Spaak's own party, the Parti Ouvrier Belge (Socialist Party), held its Congress in September and issued a statement expressing its view of the new foreign policy.

Deliberating about foreign policy, the Congress declares that it has never been and that it will never be a question of Belgium returning to neutrality...that its policy is and must be exclusive of all military alliances and within the framework of the League of Nations, a policy of complete independence without political, military, or economic restriction...³⁸

However, by August many Belgians had already begun to think in terms of returning to complete neutrality as a result of the communist dominated Popular Front Government in France.

³⁷Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Resurrection of Neutrality in Europe", The American Political Science Review, XXXIII (June, 1939), p. 473. See Appendix VII.

³⁸Contribution a l'etude de la question royale (Bruxelles: S. A. Edinco, 1946), p. 40. cited in E. Raymon Arango, Leopold III and the Belgian Royal Question (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 39.

Belgium officially renounced her military agreement with France on October 14, 1936. In a speech, King Leopold III stated that Belgium must pursue a policy aimed:

resolutely at putting us outside the conflicts of our neighbors; it responds to our national ideal. It can be achieved with a reasonable military and financial effort and it will win the support of the Belgians, who are all animated by an intense and instinctive desire for peace. Let those who doubt the possibility of such a foreign policy consider the proud and decided example of Holland and Switzerland.³⁹

Two days later at a meeting of the Council of Ministers, the King declared:

Our geographic position commands us to maintain a military apparatus of sufficient size to dissuade any of our neighbors from using our territory to attack another state. In carrying out this mission Belgium co-operates eminently in achieving peace in western Europe, and she creates for herself the right to the respect and to the eventual aid of all states which have an interest in peace...⁴⁰

The Belgian Chamber of Deputies approved the new policy of "independence" on October 29 by a vote of 126 to 42, the negative votes being cast by the fascists, the Flemish nationalists, and the communists.⁴¹

³⁹Vandenbosch, p. 269.

⁴⁰Contribution a l'etude de la Question royale (Bruxelles: S. A. Edinco, 1946), p. 42. cited in Arango, p. 40.

⁴¹NYT, October 30, 1936, p. 4.

In Germany, the Belgian change of policy received little notice. The Diplomatische Korrespondenz, an unofficial voice of the government, meekly approved.

The general tension and disquiet in Europe, and not least of all the possibilities contained in the alliance with France, which, through further obligations of the partner, could not be controlled, brought the decision in Belgium independently, and with increased individual strength, to watch over the nation's security.⁴²

There can be no doubt that Hitler was pleased with this new development; but to break out in joyous statements would have been undiplomatic on his part. He knew that the Western Powers would not violate Dutch or Belgian neutrality which therefore offered perfect cover for the northern, more vulnerable part of the Rhineland and the Ruhr. The French system of alliances was breaking down.

The year 1936 also witnessed a change in Dutch foreign policy. The German march into the Rhineland and the evident failure of the League were the basic reasons for the Netherlands taking part in the declaration of small powers on July 1. Holland was returning to her "old" neutrality. The new Belgian policy was received favorably in the Netherlands by the government and newspapers of all political trends.⁴³ With her southern

⁴²NYT, October 16, 1936, p. 3.

⁴³NYT, October 21, 1936, p. 7.

border now neutral the Netherlands felt her security was thus increased. In regards to Germany, the Minister of the Netherlands stated in September:

We are all sure that Germany intends to annex our country in due time, also Switzerland and the other countries where people of the medieval German race lived or left decedents.⁴⁴

The question of Holland's avoiding another world war was answered by Dionys van Nymegen Schonegevel, former commander of a Dutch submarine division.

Holland will not be able to stay out, and as in any event Britain will fight Germany, the latter will try to get hold of the harbors close to the English Channel.

As Holland lies in direct flying line between England and Germany, the Dutch defenses would hardly be strong enough to resist a German attack.⁴⁵

Re-militarization of the Rhineland was not the only concern of the Belgians in 1936. Domestically, the Rexist party made a strong showing by capturing twenty-one Deputy seats in the May election. The reaction in Berlin was one of satisfaction since the results indicated a rise of the Rexist Party and German solidarity in Eupen and Malmedy. The Belgian

⁴⁴Dodd, p. 353.

⁴⁵NY, October 3, 1936, p. 8.

newspaper Etoile Belge stated:

We cannot deny that the Rexists won a great victory. Degrelle chose his moment well, for all the discontent accumulated for years crystalized around him...

The votes of many Rexist partisans were expressions of resentment against the Van Zeeland policy. We are not surprised at the success of the Rexists in Eupen and Malmedy, where pro-Germans naturally welcome the little Hitler.⁴⁶

Degrelle's success was followed up in the June 7 elections for 690 provincial consulars who would in turn elect forty-four senators. The Rexists captured seventy-eight of the consular seats.

In October Degrelle promised to march on Brussels and sweep out the Van Zeeland government.

We will be bringers of peace to Europe. Our mission is to harmonize Germany and France. We are through with following France. I love that country, and it was only an accident that I was born in Belgium, for my birthplace is two miles from the French frontier. My parents are French, so is my wife.

but France under the People's Front Government makes my heart bleed. France's present government will not last. The country will be obliged to follow us. It requires only Belgium--Rexist Belgium--to close the circle

⁴⁶NYT, May 27, 1936, p. 13.

around her. Germany, Spain, Italy, and soon Belgium--all Fascist!

The old role of Belgium is finished. Under a Rexist state everything will be changed. The mission of Rex is to abolish all these old alliances and to bring Belgium to a position of first importance. Belgium will be a leader with Switzerland, Holland, and Luxembourg in a great bloc of neutrals who will bring peace to Europe.⁴⁷

When the Rexist demonstration in Brussels turned into riot, Degrelle and several other Rexist leaders were arrested by the Government. Many prominent fascists then tore up their membership cards and deserted the movement. It was also at this time that rumors were circulated concerning a trip made by Degrelle to Germany. The middle class had supported Degrelle hoping that he would get rid of unjust privileges, but suspicion of aid from Hitler moved them out of the Rexist camp. In a speech on November 22, 1936, Degrelle tried to reassure the Belgians by stating that the Rexist paralleled the powerful fascist parties of Germany and Italy "in wishing to see order and social peace reign. But there...the resemblance ends. The totalitarian State is repugnant to our temperament."⁴⁸

Also:

The principal idea of Rexism is national

⁴⁷NYT, October 25, 1936, p. 11.

⁴⁸NYT, November 23, 1936, p. 14.

rennovation...It is a question of saving the people by exalting their virtues. Belgium can and must live, but parties have suffocated what was most grand and noble in the country.⁴⁹

And:

Perhaps certain foreign governments observe with sympathy Rex's growth while awaiting a triumph in the near future. This is very natural, because we are contributing our share in the fight against communism. We do not receive any other encouragement from abroad.⁵⁰

However, Degrelle's appeal was to no avail and his party declined in strength thereafter. In a speech on January 30, 1937, Hitler declared:

Germany has, and here I repeat this solemnly, given the assurance time and time again, that for instance, between her and France there cannot be any humanly conceivable points of controversy. The German Government has further given the assurance to Belgium and Holland that it is prepared to recognize and to guarantee the inviolability and neutrality of these territories.⁵¹

Further, he officially denounced the Treaty of Versailles, especially the war-guilt clause. In effect, Hitler was offering non-aggression pacts to the Lowland states.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹U.S. Office of U. S. Chief of Council for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Agression, Vol. I, (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 631.

Belgium, having just recently renounced her military pact with France and reorientated her foreign policy, had grave doubts in regards to any new arrangement. After Germany's renunciation of the Locarno pacts, any new treaty would be of doubtful value.⁵² The Netherlands, on the other hand, were clear in their attitude. Foreign Minister de Graeff declared on February 13 that his government appreciated the offer but could never conclude:

a treaty with another state regarding the inviolability of Netherlands territory as this inviolability is for the Netherlands an axiom which cannot suitably be the subject of an agreement concluded by the Netherlands.⁵³

To further indicate her strictly neutral attitude, the Dutch Government in March officially declared that the Article of the Covenant of the League of Nations providing for free passage through territory of member states of troops engaged against a power declared by the League to be an aggressor, was no longer considered binding by Holland.

Towards the end of March, King Leopold of Belgium returned from a trip to London with assurance of Belgium's release

⁵²U. S. Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918 - 1945, From the Archives of the German Ministry, ed. by R. J. Sontag et. al. Series C, Vol. V. No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957). p. 50.

⁵³Handelingen, Eerste Kamer 1936-37, Aanhangsel, p. 23. cited in Vandenbosch, p. 276-277.

from the Locarno treaties. Belgium was expected, however, to maintain defenses adequate to her defense and to warn Great Britain of German flights over Belgium in the direction of England. Reluctantly, France also agreed and the "Brussels Declaration" of April, 1937, officially signified Belgium's new policy of "independence. Great Britain and France did promise unilaterally to aid Belgium should she attempt to stop any invasion.⁵⁴ Germany gave similar assurances, unless Belgium took part in any military action against the Reich. The same month on the twelfth, Germany and Belgium discussed a possible economic agreement.⁵⁵ In the fall, by the "Declaration of October 13, 1937", Germany gave a clear and unconditional guarantee to Belgium.⁵⁶

The situation in 1937 was tense as the other European nations awaited Germany's next move. On November 5, Hitler said that in order to preserve and enlarge the German racial community, it was necessary to secure increased living space, whatever the risk. The immediate objectives were Austria and Czechoslovakia, and their seizure could be attained only by force. This was the Hossbach Protocol.⁵⁷ It laid the groundwork

⁵⁴Black and Helmreich, p. 322.

⁵⁵NYT, April 13, 1937, p. 6.

⁵⁶U.S., Office of U.S. Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy.... Vol. I, p. 761-762. See Appendix VIII.

⁵⁷Passant, p. 200.

for Hitler's policy of the next eighteen months, and his every effort was put forth in securing its successful conclusion.

By 1937 the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands was on the decline as membership dropped from 78,000 to somewhere around 30,000.⁵⁸ In the May election Anton Mussert, the party leader, won a Chamber seat but resigned it due to his conclusion that the Netherlands was not yet ripe for the National Socialist movement. The failure of his movement was due to several reasons: (1) Netherlands were too individualistic to succumb to dictatorial processes; (2) many members lost confidence in the organizing ability of Mussert; (3) some objected to his methods; and (4) after 1935, Hitler's brutality in dealing with political opponents and his persecution of the Jews caused a reaction against Germany. Mussert did not, however, retire from the scene. On September 26, 1937, he announced the formation of a new party, the Netherlands Nationalist Movement.⁵⁹ Including many members of Mussert's former party, this group strove to convert the Netherlands to universal fascism rather than national socialism.

The Rexists in Belgium were also dealt a severe blow

⁵⁸NYT, February 18, 1937, p. 13.

⁵⁹NYT, September 27, 1937, p. 8.

at the polls on April 11, 1937. The Government received 275,840 votes or 75.89 per cent while the nationalist organization of Degrelle tallied only 69,242 votes or 19.05 per cent.⁶⁰

Although fascists in both Belgium and the Netherlands were experiencing great difficulty in keeping their parties alive, they were still strong enough to continue a policy of agitation and disruption in the Lowland states. Morally supported by Germany, they were useful tools in Hitler's hands for the spreading of German propaganda. Another element of which Hitler made full use in these and other countries was the existence of German minority groups. Their role was explicitly stated by Herman Goering in September, 1937.

You, Germans, who live abroad, have the right and the duty to declare yourselves Germans and National Socialists. You are the SERVANTS of the homeland. German Nazi-ism is a world philosophy.⁶¹

The events of March, 1938, shocked the whole world. On March 12 and 13 Hitler made his next decisive move and invaded Austria, annexing it to the Reich. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg all realized the seriousness of this event and

⁶⁰NYT, April 12, 1937, p. 1.

⁶¹Dorothy Thompson, "Nazi Foreign Missions: German Propaganda in the U.S. and the World", Vital Speeches of the Day, III (September 15, 1937), p. 713.

the consequences it would have on their future. In a Reichstag speech as far back as May 21, 1935, Hitler had declared:

Germany had neither the intention nor the will to intervene in internal Austrian affairs or to annex Austria and so join Austria to herself.⁶²

It now seemed that German assurance over any matter was worthless. But it must be remembered that the majority of the Austrians welcomed the Anschluss.

The Belgium Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, reaffirmed his government's position before parliament.

The policy of independence is not perhaps the ideal policy, but it is, I become more convinced every day, the best possible policy... Faced with the debris of the Treaty of Locarno and the failure of the League of Nations, what should we have done...? It is necessary to keep in mind, above all preconceived theories, the indisputable facts: our geographic position, the relativity of our forces, the existence in our country of Flemings and Walloons; it is necessary above all to keep in mind that decisive element: in western Europe, Belgium is an essential factor of European equilibrium.⁶³

In Luxembourg, the press carried such violent attacks against Germany's action that on March 28 the Reich issued a warning

⁶² Fraser, p. 103.

⁶³ Contribution a l'etude de la question royale (Bruxelles: S. A. Edinco, 1946), p. 68. cited in Arango, 42-43.

that further attacks would not be tolerated.⁶⁴ The Dutch reaction was similar to that of Luxembourg and on May 5 the NSDAP's official organ, the Voelkischer Beobachter, reported:

We see the moment approaching when our patience will be exhausted and when we shall have to look around for means of making the Dutch public realize that a continuation of this detestable activity serves neither it nor the Reich. It will then be scarcely possible to avoid that, in such a defense against attack, economic relations should play a role.⁶⁵

On July 24 and 25 the foreign ministers of the Oslo States met at Copenhagen to explore problems of common interest. They agreed to maintain contact with each other to co-operate in every effort at international conciliation in a spirit of impartiality and independence with respect to the different groups of powers. They also reaffirmed their position as regards the non-compulsory character of League sanctions.

The small states had two goals. First, they desired to prevent the return of the system of balance of power, which would of necessity involve them in the political and military entanglements of the Great Powers; second, they wished to restrict as much as possible their own obligations within the

⁶⁴ NYT, March 29, 1938, p. 13.

⁶⁵ NYT, May 5, 1938, p. 16.

system of collective security.

During the summer of 1938 events were developing towards the German incorporation of Czechoslovakia. On a tense day in late September the Netherlands cancelled all leaves and increased her frontier guard. Belgium also increased her troop strength and on September 27 Spaak stated:

The Great Powers have guaranteed Belgium's frontiers, and all recent information indicates these engagements will be kept. Our territory will not be a battleground of Europe.⁶⁶

Before the League Assembly, the Luxembourg delegate declared:

The Government of Luxembourg has never ceased to affirm that the geographical situation of the country and the complete absence of means of defense oblige the Government to maintain in the League of Nations its traditional policy of neutrality imposed upon the Grand-Duchy by the Treaty of London in the interest of European peace.⁶⁷

In accordance with this policy Luxembourg refused to allow war material to be transported on her railroads, the government declared that the Grand-Duchy would not sell war material to any country involved in a possible conflict, even if it became necessary to close down her iron and steel mills.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ NYT, September 28, 1938; p. 17.

⁶⁷ Luxembourg and the German Invasion..., p. 29.

⁶⁸ NYT, September 28, 1938, p. 14.

The Munich Conference on September 29 and 30 relieved the European tension only temporarily. In November King Leopold of Belgium made a visit to Holland, and on its conclusion Queen Wilhelmina announced her intention of a return visit the next year. During the Czechoslovakian crisis the two Lowland states forgot old problems and visualized the necessity of close collaboration in the political and economic activity of the two nations. A secret document sent to the General Staff of the German Air Force on August 24, 1938, indicated Germany's intentions regarding the two Lowland states. It read:

Belgium and the Netherlands would, in German hands, represent an extra-ordinary advantage in the prosecution of the air war against Great Britain as well as against France. Therefore it is held to be essential to obtain the opinion of the Army as to the conditions under which an occupation of this area could be carried out and how long it would take, and in the case it would be necessary to reassess the commitment against Great Britain.⁶⁹

In January of 1939 Hitler began raising the question of colonies and demanded their redistribution, not just the return of former German territories. Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands were expected to contribute to a common

⁶⁹U.S., Office of U.S. Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy..., Vol. I, p. 762.

fund. Holland was pressured by the threat of a German economic blockade. Under this threat and the fear of growing German hostility, the value of the Dutch guilder declined. However, the German proposal on colonial redistribution was ignored by the parties concerned and no further attention was given to it.

Chancellor Hitler, in his Reichstag speech on January 30, 1939, declared:

Germany is happy today in the possession of peaceful frontiers in the West, South, and North.

Our relations with the Western and Northern States, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Baltic States, become all the more satisfactory with the increasing tendency in these countries to turn away from certain articles of the Covenant of the League of Nations which involved danger of war.⁷⁰

The Netherlands was still not reassured by Hitler's speech and withheld any official statement which would aggravate Germany's already seemingly hostile attitude. The Dutch Foreign Minister, Jan Patijn, on February 24 denied that at any time had his government given credence to rumors that Germany had plans against the Netherlands.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Adolf Hitler, Speech Delivered by Adolf Hitler Before The German Reichstag on January 30, 1939 (Berlin: M. Muller & Sohn K.G., 1939), p. 61.

⁷¹ NYT, February 26, 1939, p. 22.

When Germany occupied what remained of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, Hitler exhibited to all the world the worth of his word. On September 26, 1938, he had declared in a speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin:

I assured Mr. Chamberlain and I repeat the assured now, that when this problem is solved there are no further territorial problems for Germany in Europe... I further assured him that I shall then be no longer interested in the Czech State. And I guarantee him that. We do not want any Czechs.⁷²

The Netherlands Government immediately announced that it would strengthen its border defenses but would still avoid any military pact. Prime Minister Colijn, in a radio broadcast on April 11, clearly stated that the Dutch action was not the result of recent events, but that the general European situation made strengthened border defenses desirable.⁷³

Belgium took similar steps as she remembered what had happened to her in 1914. Hitler had used the German minority as a pretext for his action in Czechoslovakia and Belgium feared she would soon suffer the same fate. On March 29 the Belgian government protested to the Reich in regards to a radio broadcast

⁷²Fraser, p. 105.

⁷³NYT, April 12, 1939, p. 4.

from Cologne which fomented a separatist movement in Eupen and Malmédy. The German Ambassador to Belgium, Vicco Karl Alexander von Helldorf-Schwante, immediately expressed his government's regret and promised there would be no recurrence of such activity.⁷⁴

Due to the threatening European situation, President Roosevelt of the United States sent a telegram to Hitler on April 15 asking the Chancellor if he was willing to give assurance to several independent nations. Hitler responded by requesting the countries mentioned in the telegram if they felt threatened and if they had authorized Roosevelt to make the proposal. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg were all included and all three answered both questions in the negative.

The German magazine News From Germany, a propaganda periodical published for circulation in foreign countries, in its June, 1939, issue published an article on the Reich's relations with Holland and Belgium. It said, "The Reich acknowledges without reserve the independence of both countries, but wishes it to be respected by all other nations--likewise."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ NYT, March 30, 1939, p. 5.

⁷⁵ H. R. Hoffmann (ed.), "Germany's Neighbourly relations with Holland and Belgium", News From Germany, No. 10 (June, 1939), p. 5.

In May Hitler had begun laying plans for his attack on Poland and on the twenty-second he concluded the "Pact of Steel" with Mussolini. His next step was to begin negotiations with the Soviet Union for a possible Russo-German pact. This effort was finally realized with the signing of a non-aggression pact of ten years duration on August 23. Meanwhile, European attention was focused on events in Warsaw and Berlin. Germany demanded improvement of Polish treatment of the German minority there and the return of the city of Danzig to the Reich.

By the middle of August Europe expected a German attack on Poland at almost any moment. Belgium on August 21 called for a meeting of the Oslo powers in Brussels. In their name King Leopold, in a radio broadcast on August 23 called "on the men who are responsible for the course of events to submit their disputes and their claims to open negotiations."⁷⁶

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg were all notified by the German ambassadors in the respective countries that their borders would be respected in case of war. In Belgium's case this gesture followed Belgium's assurance on August 25 that she would stay out of the conflict.⁷⁷ Luxembourg followed

⁷⁶William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1962), p. 747.

⁷⁷U.S., Department of State Publication, Documents on German Foreign Policy..., Series D., Vol. VII, No. 279 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 290-291.

suit on August 26.⁷⁸ To the possibility of Luxembourg suspending iron and steel production, Germany responded by stating that it would consider the action "directed unilaterally against German interests, and one difficult to reconcile with Luxembourg neutrality."⁷⁹ The Netherlands was assured by German Ambassador to Holland, Julius von Zech-Burkersroda.⁸⁰

Dutch and Belgian mobilization began on the 28th, followed that evening by a joint Belgo-Dutch request to the ambassadors of Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Poland to appear at the Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs to receive an official communication. A similar request took place in Belgium. Each ambassador was informed that the King of Belgium and the Queen of the Netherlands were prepared to offer their good offices in order to bring the parties together. However, the offer came to nothing.

In Berlin on August 31, 1939, Hitler issued Directive No. 1 for the conduct of the war to the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. In the second paragraph of point number three the directive stated, "The neutrality of Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland to which we have given assurances

⁷⁸Ibid., No. 321, p. 326-327.

⁷⁹Ibid., No. 402, p. 398.

⁸⁰NYT, August 27, 1939, p. 32.

must be scrupulously observed."⁸¹ At dawn on September 1 Hitler sent his armored divisions into Poland. The days of Munich were gone and on September 3, both France and Great Britain declared war on the German Reich. Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, described Hitler's reaction upon the translation of the British note.

For a while Hitler sat in his chair deep in thought, and stared rather worriedly into space. Then he broke his silence with ... "What are we going to do now?"⁸²

⁸¹ Shirer, p. 782.

⁸² David Thompson, Europe Since Napoleon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 715-716.

CHAPTER V

THE END OF NEUTRALITY

On September 1, 1939, the Luxembourg Chamber voted emergency powers to the grand-ducal government which claimed strict neutrality and forbade the export of arms and munitions on September 6.¹ The Netherlands on September 4 declared:

In connection with the situation of war that now exists between some nations, the Netherlands Government wants to declare that it will keep a strictly neutral attitude.²

In Belgium a similar statement was issued and the Lower house gave King Leopold dictatorial power to deal with the crisis.

In giving assurance to Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the German Government had made it clear that it expected these states to continue normal commercial activity with the Reich.³ Luxembourg, which had inferred a possible

¹Luxembourg and the German Invasion..., p. 32.

²NYT, September 4, 1939, p. 15.

³U.S., Department of State Publication, Documents on German Foreign Policy..., Series D., Vol. VIII, No. 17, p. 16-17.

stoppage of its iron and steel works in the case of a general European war, informed the Reich on September 7 that such an action did not imply a failure on Luxembourg's part to maintain neutrality even though the Reich had stated it would.⁴ However the Luxembourg Government indicated that for the time being, iron and steel production would continue.

In a speech from the throne opening parliament, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands stated on September 19:

I appear before you in gloomy circumstances ...although the country has been able to preserve its peace. I feel deep compassion for those nations suffering war. Our friendly relations continue with all powers, especially the Oslo group... The Oslo group's collaboration was expressed in King Leopold's appeal "for peace" and in our common offer of good offices. Although we were disappointed, hope still remains.

The economic life of the Netherlands has been hit, mainly on account of the marine warfare, but our finances are unshaken... Trade will continue as normally as possible. The nation's unity and morale are exemplary.⁵

Throughout the two decades between the world wars, the Netherlands had always refused to accept any guarantee of her independence and territorial integrity. Belgium, on the other hand, had formed a military alliance with France in 1920, had

⁴ Ibid., No. 20, p. 19-20.

⁵ NYT, September 20, 1939, p. 12.

been a signatory to the Locarno Treaties, and when she was released from the Locarno agreements, she had accepted guarantees from Great Britain, France, and Germany. Therefore, from a purely theoretical point of view, Belgium's status was not as firmly founded as that of the Netherlands. Luxembourg's neutrality was somewhere in between. "Our neutrality is guaranteed by the numerous treaties to which Germany, France, and Great Britain are parties..."⁶

Hitler spoke of Germany's relations with Holland and Belgium in the Reichstag on October 6, 1939.

The new Reich has endeavored to continue the traditional friendship with Holland; it did not take over any differences between the two States, nor did it create new ones...Immediately after I had taken over the Government, I tried to establish friendly relations with Belgium. I renounced any revision as well as any desire for revision. The Reich has put forward no claim which might in any way have been regarded as a threat to Belgium.⁷

The following day an order from the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Walther Von Brauchitsch, to various Army Groups contained the passage:

⁶ NYT, September 27, 1939, p. 3.

⁷ Adolf Hitler, Speech...On October 6, 1939 (Berlin: M. Muller & Sohn K.G., 1939), p. 19.

Army Group B has to make all preparations according to special orders, for immediate invasion of Dutch and Belgian territory, if the political situation so demands.⁸

Two days later Hitler personally directed:

Preparations should be made for offensive action on the northern flank of the Western Front crossing the area of Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland. This attack must be carried out as soon and as forcefully as possible... The object is to acquire as great an area of Holland, Belgium and Northern France as possible.⁹

In a secret letter from German General Keitel concerning Fall Gelb (code name for operations in the Low countries), he wrote, "The more Dutch territory we occupy the more effective can the defense of the Ruhr area be made."¹⁰ Apparently Hitler intended to invade the Lowland states in early November of 1939, but for some unknown reason, perhaps adverse weather, he postponed the attack.¹¹

In hopes of averting a further extension of the war, King Leopold of Belgium and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands again offered their good offices to the belligerent states.¹² The quick defeat of Poland and the massing of German troops

⁸U.S., Office of U.S. Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy..., Vol. 1, p. 766.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 634.

¹¹Vandenboach, p. 284.

¹²NYT, November 8, 1939, p. 4. See Appendix IX.

along the frontiers of Belgium and Holland made it essential for the Belgians and Dutch to combine their efforts. Hitler claimed the troops were reserves and the area was suitable for billeting. The German move may only have been a feint to see how the Netherlands and Belgium would react.

The Belgian-Dutch offer of their good offices came to nothing. In Germany, Ribbentrop informed Franz von Papen that the offer would not even be answered. Papen referred it to Goering who stated that Hitler and Ribbentrop had made up their minds to have it out with Britain.¹³

The Netherlands' city of Venloo became the scene of an important incident in German-Dutch relations on November 9, 1939. Members of the German Gestapo crossed the border and kidnapped two British agents, and in the ensuing gun battle, an officer of the Netherlands General Staff was killed. The Dutch Government immediately requested Germany to explain the action, but the Reich Government denied any knowledge of the affair. However, towards the end of November, Germany demanded that the Netherlands explain the presence of a Dutch General Staff officer with the British agents. The Reich also charged

¹³ Franz von Papen, Franz von Papen: Memoirs, trans. Brian Connell (New York: Dutton & Company, Inc., 1953), p. 285.

that the neutral states were being undermined by the Western powers. Thus Hitler was already laying the framework of his future reasons for attacking the Lowland states.

Along this same theme, Germany claimed that the Netherlands was being forced to submit to Britain's blockade against Germany. On November 11, the Dutch declared:

We do not wish to become an extension of British measures against Germany, nor do we wish the opposite...It is because we are neutral that we must adopt such an attitude.¹⁴

Belgium was the object of an attack by the Voelkischer Beobachter in mid-November. The newspaper claimed that Belgian harbors were being used to transfer goods from neutral countries to Britain.¹⁵ The German press further tried to frighten the Lowland states into leaving the League of Nations by declaring that neutrals attending League meetings were guilty of unneutral acts since the League had become an "Anglo-French organ."¹⁶

Hitler's intention to attack Holland and Belgium was clearly laid down on November 23.

My decision is unchangable. I shall attack France and England at the most favorable and earliest moment. Breach of the neutrality of Belgium and Holland is of no importance.

¹⁴ NYT, November 11, 1939, p. 2.

¹⁵ NYT, November 17, 1939, p. 1.

¹⁶ Vandenbosch, p. 286-287.

Not one will question that when we have won. We shall not justify the breach of neutrality as idiotically as in 1914.¹⁷

The neutrals had strong suspicions of this intention, and as a result there was a marked change in their attitude regarding their position. In Belgium on December 12 the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies approved a report stating that "conditions that led us to adopt neutrality would be modified" if the Netherlands were attacked.¹⁸ Three days later Foreign Minister Spaak reaffirmed Belgium's neutrality but added, "Belgium would never be indifferent should the independence of the Netherlands be threatened."¹⁹

In the Netherlands, the Dutch press was also exhibiting a change of attitude by the end of December. No longer did they constantly refer to principles of international law and moral expressions. Instead, there was grim determination to face whatever the future might hold. There was also a proposal at this time to neutralize Luxembourg as an international hospital zone. In this way, the Grand-Duchy hoped to further secure their independence.

In the early part of January, 1940, the Brussels Gazette

¹⁷ Shirer, p. 870.

¹⁶ NYT, December 13, 1939, p. 5.

¹⁹ NYT, December 20, 1939, p. 3.

carried an article recounting how the Belgian defense lines could swiftly be occupied by French troops should Germany invade Belgium. The Angriff, organ of Germany's Propaganda Ministry reacted quickly with a warning.

Despite the perilous position of their country there are always Belgian journalists who do not know how to quit playing with fire...Such propaganda is an infraction of neutrality, for it aims to prepare opinion for French and English invasion of Belgium.

Why does the Belgium Government make so little use of its full powers to remain silent before this provocation activity?²⁰

Meanwhile, Dutch-Belgo relations were improving more every day. In a discussion between Spaak and the German Ambassador to Belgium on January 11, Spaak reaffirmed his country's attitude should Holland be attacked by either side of the ensuing conflict.²¹ In the Netherlands Foreign Minister Van Kleffens declared on January 25 that "economic relations between the Netherlands and Belgium should be made as narrow as possible."²²

Hitler ordered the attack on Belgium and Holland to begin on January 17, but on the tenth, a German military plane was forced down over Belgian territory. In a note later released

²⁰NYT, January 7, 1940, p. 1.

²¹U.S., Department of State Publication, Documents on German Foreign Policy..., Series D., Vol. VIII, No. 522, p. 646.

²²NYT, January 26, 1940, p. 5.

by the Belgian Government, it was disclosed that the plane was carrying German plans for the attack in the West. Thus the operation scheduled for the seventeenth was called off. In a top secret dispatch from Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Belgium, the German Ambassador was ordered to claim no knowledge of the incident and remind the Belgian Government of a Belgian troop build-up along the German-Belgian frontier.²³ Again Germany was trying to establish a pretext for the future German invasion of Belgium.

The War Trade Agreement signed by France, Great Britain, and Belgium in February established that Belgium was to refrain from re-exporting ~~some~~ material than she did before the war.²⁴ This was a move by the Allied Powers to curtail Germany's use of Belgium to evade the Allied blockade and added to the German list of grievances against the Lowland state. In mid-April, Germany began circulating rumors about a possible invasion of Holland and Belgium by the Allied Forces. Then came the German invasion of Norway.

The fate of Norway was an indication to both Belgium and

²³U.S., Department of State Publication, Documents on German Foreign Policy..., Series D., Vol. VIII, No. 585, p. 723.

²⁴NYT, February 15, 1940, p.4.

the Netherlands that they were next. During a parliamentary debate on April 16 and 17, Foreign Minister Spaak of Belgium declared:

Probably like the rest of you, during the past months I have often thought about our foreign policy announced five years ago. Just the other evening I reread the various diplomatic acts which concern us and the declarations which accompanied them. And I arrived once more at the comforting conviction that our foreign policy has been perfectly loyal and clear, perfectly honest. Doubtless, few countries have so well defined their objectives, limited their commitments to those which they were sure of being able to support, and enlightened their neighbors regarding their intentions. With us there is neither abrupt change nor surprise; whatever happens, no one will be able to say that he was deceived by Belgium.²⁵

Foreign Minister M. Beck of Luxembourg, concerned about his country's fate, protested against the military preparations and constructions on Germany's western frontier. To the German minister in Luxembourg he remarked:

I should feel so much easier if you could tell me that you are personally convinced that your Government has no intention of violating the neutrality of my country.²⁶

However, the German minister evaded the question and made no

²⁵ Contribution a l'etude de la question royale (Bruxelles: S. A. Edimco, 1946), p. 112. cited in Arango, p. 44.

²⁶ Luxembourg and the German Invasion..., p. 33.

answer.

On May 9, Luxembourg received word of an impending German attack. In the Netherlands Van Kleffens received a call from the Dutch Intelligence Service which had intercepted a message from Berlin. It read, "To-morrow at dawn! hold tight."²⁷ At dawn on the next day, May 10, 1940, the expected came as one and a quarter million German troops (67 divisions) poured into Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

The German Government charged that the press in the Lowland states had been hostile and defense measures taken by them showed a clear departure from neutrality: they had fortified their eastern frontiers and left the western and southern ones open. For these reasons and for the purpose of protecting the Lowland states from an impending Allied invasion, Germany occupied the three neutral states. Support for the German claim of an Allied invasion was presented in the form of a White Book which contained several eye-witness reports on the presence of Allied soldiers in the recently occupied states.²⁸

The end came quickly as the Benelux nations were over-

²⁷ John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (2nd ed.; London: MacMillan & Company, Ltd., 1964), p. 496.

²⁸ German Foreign Office, Allied Intrigue in the Low Countries: Further Documents Concerning the Anglo-French Policy of Extending the War (New York: German Library of Information, 1940), p. 14-15.

whelmed by the numerically and technically superior German forces. The Dutch army capitulated on May 15, followed by the surrender of the Belgian army on the night of May 27. The German victory not only destroyed the independence and territorial integrity of the three Benelux states, it also destroyed neutrality as a feasible international principle.

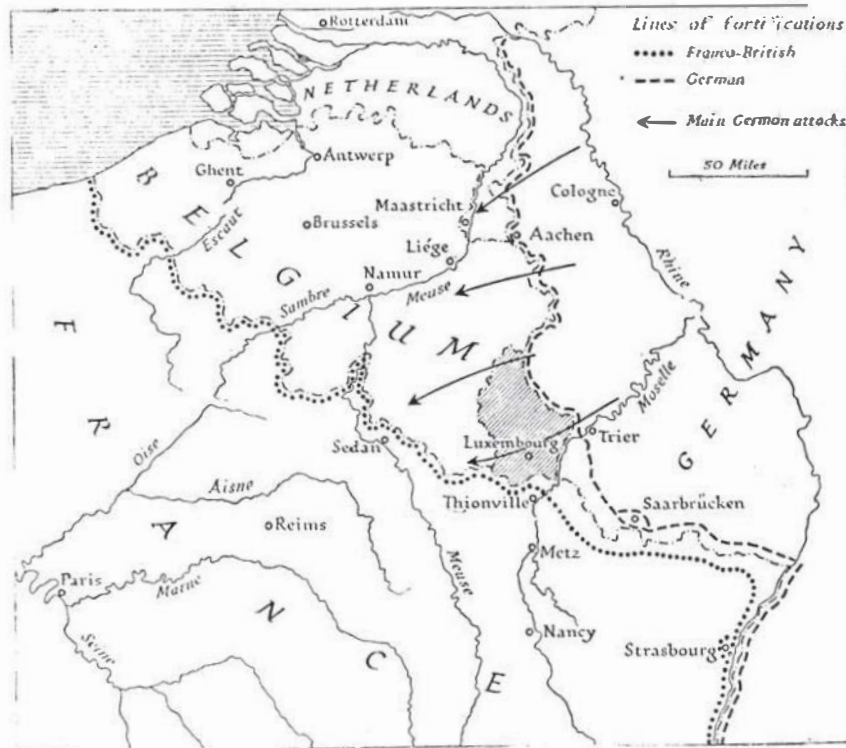


Fig. 4 _____ The German Invasion, May 1940

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In any historical presentation, objectivity on the part of the author is an essential factor. However, if it is the author's intention to develop a particular thesis, objectivity may suffer in the process. It is therefore necessary to point out that this work involves an interpretation of the facts leading to a certain hypothesis. Nazi Germany collapsed only a little over twenty years ago, and it is for this reason that any evaluation of the Third Reich must be handled in a delicate manner. Much has been published on this period of German history, but personal experiences and prejudices have often blurred the "objective" endeavors of the authors. It has been my aim to search out the available facts and to pursue as nearly as possible a methodology of objectivity.

In 1919 an attempt was made to create a new and better international system for the purpose of eliminating forceful or violent solutions to international disputes. This attempt

was expressed in the form of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and its basis was the Treaty of Versailles--a poor foundation for any organization dedicated to world peace and the equality of states. As history has shown, the new system was finally destroyed by the very seeds from which it sprang and resulted in another world war. Many factors were involved in the gradual break down of this system, but the most potent cause was nationalism.

Nationalism still rules supreme... It seems today at the climax of its historical development. It has penetrated all countries and all continents. It has aroused ever-growing numbers of formerly non-nationalistic or non-active masses into active nationalism. It seems to have established its dominion over all lands and over all seas. With the population of fascist countries, Italy and Germany, nationalism has become almost a frenzy and a fury... Humanity seems lost and abandoned without hope to a world gone mad with nationalism.¹

Hitler played nationalism to its extreme. Nazi Germany became an entity above all other criteria, and the individual was subordinated to its existence. This included not only those living within the boundaries of the Reich, but also Germans residing in foreign countries. The basic difference

¹Hans Kohn, "The Twilight of Nationalism?" The American Scholar, VI (Summer, 1937), p. 266.

between the two groups was that those living outside Germany became an important tool of Hitler's foreign policy. But this was to be expected considering Germany's weak military position in the early thirties and the French system of alliances which encircled Germany. In order to regain her status as a great power, Germany had to re-establish her military machine and break the French alliance system.

Due to the depression and the internal problems that existed within the other European states at this time, Hitler was able to repudiate the Versailles verdict and to begin the rebuilding of his armed forces. In the area of diplomacy he exploited the non-aggression pact. This was a pact between two neighboring states not to make war on each other for a certain period. It contained no obligations to act as allies against other nations. Thus the Nazis could claim it was a pact designed for peace whereas most other treaties were alliances for purposes of war. The non-aggression pact served as a sense of security for the other contracting party while it gave Hitler the time he needed to complete his domestic programs. More important, it enabled him to break up the French system of alliances. As a counter-part to his policy of concluding pacts involving only two nations, he was to later lean towards the prosecution of wars involving only two nations.

In the cases of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands Hitler offered them non-aggression pacts but was turned down by each. Luxembourg and the Netherlands both refused on the grounds of their neutrality. Belgium always relied on her military agreement with France and when this was dissolved in 1936, the Belgian Government turned to a policy of "independence" which closely resembled neutrality. Therefore she was never in a position to accept a pact from Hitler.

World War I had weakened faith in the idea of buffer states and in the principle of guaranteed neutrality--Belgium and Luxembourg were glaring examples of its failure. Neutrality failed not as a result of an internal weakness but because of external forces. In a period of rising nationalism, neutrality was not a feasible policy to pursue. In the late 1930's Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands constantly professed their neutrality but to no avail. As long as it was in the interests of a nationalistic state like Nazi Germany, neutrality would be violated whenever feasible. Germany regarded a sudden and decisive blow in the West essential for a quick end of the war and a German victory. France had to be eliminated immediately and the only way was to smash at the French frontier through the Lowland states. As a pretext for its action, the Reich Government claimed it was protecting the neutral states from a

forthcoming Allied Invasion. Hans J. Morgenthau wrote in 1939:

The fate of neutrality of small states ...ultimately will not be decided by them, but by the Great Powers; and this decision will be made, not according to legal formulae and ideological principles, but according to the real or presumed interests of those Powers.²

In a world where "power politics" is the rule, neutrality can serve as a feasible foreign policy only so long as it is in the interests of other powers to respect it. In the beginning Nazi Germany respected the neutrality of the small European states, not from any moral considerations, but due to her impotent status after World War I. They also provided a convenient shield behind which Germany could prepare for her future actions. Once Germany had resumed the status as a "might" state under Nazi rule, she too could play "power politics." And, as fate would have it, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands were caught in the middle.

² Morgenthau, The American Political Science Review, XXXIII, No. 3, p. 486.

APPENDIX I

The Belgian argument for revision of the Treaty of 1839 was clarified by Minister Ort.

...first, that the violation of the Treaty by Germany and Austria was the origin of the war between Belgium and these countries, and that in order to end the war and make peace it is indispensable to revert to treaties, the violation of which caused the war.

Second, the Belgian delegates have shown that all the agreements of 1839 form one treaty, which are inseparable.

Third, the delegates have shown the dangers of inconveniences which the treaty created for Belgium, which the experience of the war has proved sufficiently.

Fourth, the delegates proposed that Holland, although neutral, should be invited to send representatives to this conference.*

*NYT, March 15, 1919, p. 1.

APPENDIX II

An outline of Belgium's position on the Franco-Belgo occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 was presented by Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs M. Jaspar.

I think Germany cannot avoid...making a proposition soon...The sooner she makes it the better it will be for her. Germany is completely cut off from the Ruhr and can no longer receive coal, coke or mineral products, whereas through our organization of transport we send 10,000 tons of coal and coke daily into France and Belgium, with which the blast furnaces of both countries are kept going as in pre-war days. From this the solution is evident....I have not the slightest doubt ...that Germany is capable of paying as much now as last January. These facts are not forgotten: First, that Germany, cut off from the Ruhr, had enough coal and coke in reserve to continue work as in the preceding few months; secondly, that she was able to throw quantities of foreign bills into the market so as temporarily to arrest the fall of the mark; third, all Germany's industrial apparatus--coal mines, factories, railroads, shipping and her new fleet-- are intact... Ever since the armistice Belgium has adopted a moderate attitude and has endeavored to avoid rigorous methods.

More than once Belgium has succeeded in uniting her friends, England and France, in order to arrive at an amicable solution. Germany has, however, opposed all our attempts at moderation, with obstinate bad faith, refusing to deliver the coal and wood necessary for the rebuilding of factories and the reconstruction of the devastated regions, and by refusing to pay the sums she agreed to pay. She organized the fall of the mark by printing paper money, and because she refused to tax the population she has been unable to balance her budget...

Belgium is not striving for any political object in the Ruhr, and it would be ridiculous to attribute imperialistic ideas to our country. She merely wishes to force the German industrial powers, which are very rich and whose factories are all still intact, to pay or guarantee the reparations for Germany... We can no longer accept simple promises or signatures from Germany....*

*NYT, April 28, 1923, p. 3.

APPENDIX III

The following is part of King Albert's letter to
Prime Minister M. Renkin.

Each state...acting independently, has used all the means at its disposal to prevent its own national economy from being affected by the crisis. By the constant increase of customs duties, surtaxes and quotas, by the control of trade and exchange, efforts seem to have been made everywhere to reduce imports. The result has been an inevitable reduction of exports. The consequences of this restricted policy have been disastrous; it had led, to use the expression of the League of Nations' Financial Commission, to a gradual "stifling of international trade."

For three years the value of international trade has been reduced by half, and this reduction is only partially due to the fall in prices. The contraction of foreign markets has not been compensated by a corresponding expansion of the national market; the latter's capacity of consumption diminishes steadily. During the same period of three years, the number of unemployed has doubled. It has thus been definitely proved that no country is able, by itself, to alter in its favor the course of economic evolution. A concerted action of

the States towards international solidarity can alone cure the grave evils from which the world is suffering. It is time that this solidarity should assert itself otherwise than by speeches. It seems to me that Belgium should not hesitate to take the initiative which circumstances require, and to secure to this end the help of the States which, like our country, felt keenly the necessity of a change in economic policy. I know, my dear Prime Minister, that you and all the members of my Government share my anxieties. I rely on you and your colleagues to take the measures required by an increasingly alarming situation.*

*Cammaerts, p. 330-331.

APPENDIX IV

The National Socialist Netherlands Worker's Party

was directed by Major von Kruyt and its program contained the following points.

1. We demand, especially in the cultural and economic fields, that on the basis of the right of self-determination all Netherlands be included in a Greater Netherlands.
2. We demand that our nation, culturally, politically and economically, should assume a Germanic attitude of mind and sentiment: that thereby we should be brought close to our brother nations--Flemings, Boers, Germans, German Swiss and Scandinavians--so that together, as the bearers of a renewed western culture, we may in a mighty union resist in influence of other national groups.
3. Only he can be a citizen who is a member of the nation. All those are members of the nation who are bound together by race, culture and historical destiny. No Jew can be a member of the nation!
4. He who is not a citizen, can only live in the Netherlands as a guest under guest law.*

*World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, The Brown Network..., p. 140-141.

APPENDIX V

In a memorandum from Leopold von Hoesch, the German Ambassador to Great Britain, to Anthony Eden, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the German diplomat clarified the German position on the Franco-Soviet pact (memorandum: dated March 7, 1936).

1. It is an undisputed fact that the Franco-Soviet Pact is exclusively directed against Germany.
2. It is an undisputed fact that in the Pact France undertakes, in the event of a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union, obligations which go far beyond her duty as laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations, and which compel her to take military action against Germany even when she cannot appeal either to a recommendation or to an actual decision of the Council of the League.
3. It is an undisputed fact that France, in such a case, claims for herself the right to decide on her own judgement who is the aggressor.
4. It is thereby established that France has undertaken towards the Soviet Union obligations which practically amount to undertaking in a given case to act as if neither the Covenant of the League of

Nations, nor the Rhine Pact, which refers to the Covenant, were valid.*

*Gantenbein, p. 651-652.

APPENDIX VI

In a speech before parliament on March 11, 1936, Premier Van Zeeland stated his government's position on Germany's march into the Rhineland.

Violation of the Locarno Treaty and reoccupation of the Rhineland were a severe blow to pacifist peoples... and Belgium is the country threatened most... The existence of a demilitarized zone on our German frontier constituted protection behind which we felt less exposed. If it is true today that no country in the world is able to assure its own security alone, it is even surer when applied to a small nation, for which respect for international law assumes capital importance. The Locarno Treaty has been repeatedly said to be the foundation and the essential part of Belgium's international status. Germany's action in tearing it up strikes Belgium more gravely and severely than any other country. Yet Belgium has adhered firmly to her part in this pact. The German memorandum takes as a pre-text the pretended violation in the Franco-Soviet pact, but Belgium had no part and no connection with the Franco-Soviet negotiation. For us it has no consequences, for we are neither directly nor indirectly concerned.

We can say without fear of contradiction that we have kept the Locarno Treaty not only in letter, but in spirit. We have been absolutely loyal and clear....*

*NYT, March 12, 1936, p. 13.

APPENDIX VII

The following is the joint declaration by Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland on July 1, 1936, which in effect was a cancellation of their obligations under Article XVI of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

The aggravated international situation and in cases in which in recent years under violation of the Covenant of the League of Nations resort was taken to violence...have given rise to grave doubts in our minds whether the premises under which we had taken upon ourselves the obligations contained in the Covenant still continue to exist to a satisfactory extent. In our opinion it cannot be admitted that certain articles of the Covenant of the League...remain a dead letter whereas other articles are applied... Although we call attention to the principles of interpretation adopted in 1921 with regard to the application of Article 16 of the Covenant, we declare that as long as the Covenant in its entirety is applied only in an incomplete and inconsistent manner, we are obliged to take this fact into account in applying these articles.*

*Societe des Nations, Journal off., Supp. Special, No. 154, p. 17, 18 Neue Zurcher Zeitung, July 2, 1936, cited in Morgenthau, The American Political Science Review, XXXIII, No. 3, p. 473.

APPENDIX VIII

After England and France released Belgium from the Locarno Pact, Germany gave the Benelux state a clear and unconditional guarantee on October 13, 1937.

Since the conclusion of a treaty to replace the treaty of Locarno may still take some time, and being desirous of strengthening the peaceful aspirations of the two countries, the German Government regards it as appropriate to define now its own attitude towards Belgium. To this end, it makes the following declaration: First, the German Government has taken note of the views which the Belgian Government has thought fit to express. That is to say, (a) of the policy of independence which it intends to exercise in full sovereignty; (b) of its determination to defend the frontiers of Belgium with all its forces against any aggressions or invasion and to prevent Belgian territory from being used for purposes of aggression against another state as passage or as a base of operation by land, by sea, or in the air, and to organize the defenses of Belgium in an efficient manner to this purpose. Two: The German Government considers that the inviolability and integrity of Belgium are common interests of the Western Powers. It

confirms its determination that in no circumstances will it impair this inviolability and integrity and that it will at all times respect Belgian territory except, of course, in the event of Belgium's taking part in a military action directed against Germany in an armed conflict in which Germany is involved. The German Government, like the British and French Governments, is prepared to assist Belgium should she be subjected to an attack or invasion.*

*U.S., Office of U.S. Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy..., Vol. I. p. 761-762.

APPENDIX IX

The following is the offer of good offices by King Leopold of Belgium and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands in November of 1939.

At this hour of anxiety for the whole world, before the war breaks out on the Western Front in all its violence, we have the conviction that it is our duty once again to raise our voice.

Sometime ago the belligerent parties have declared they would not be unwilling to examine a reasonable and well founded basis for equitable peace.

It seems to us that in the present circumstances it is difficult for them to come into contact in order to state their standpoints with greater precision and bring them nearer one another.

As the sovereigns of two neutral States having good relations with all their neighbors we are ready to offer them our good offices. If this were agreeable to them we are disposed to facilitate by every means at our disposal that they might care to suggest to us and in the spirit of friendly understanding to ascertain the elements of an agreement to be arrived at.

This, it seems to us, is the task we have to fulfill for the good of our peoples and in the interests of the whole world.

We hope our offer will be accepted and that thus the first step will be taken toward an establishment of a durable peace.*

*NYT, November 8, 1939, p. 4.

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