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The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance. Czechoslovak-French cooperation in military intelligence in the years 1932–1938

From the outset, cooperation in the field of military intelligence comprised an important part of the Czechoslovak-French alliance in the period between the two world wars. It was, however, also marked by a characteristic element of asymmetry, among other things. This was typical for an alliance between a traditional power in global politics and a new, medium-sized successor state, which was established thanks to a combination of the concerted efforts of the Czechoslovak resistance and the positive outcomes of the global conflict in 1914–1918. In terms of basic principles, Czechoslovakia and France were united by a belief in the value of democracy and the conviction that it was necessary to defend it. This consisted of an intellectual and ideological dimension and the basis of an alliance that emerged in a war, during a time of struggles against a common enemy. Despite this, from the very beginning of peacetime, the aforementioned imbalance between the two countries was reflected in the disparity of objectives, possibilities, and circumstances. It was a given that the asymmetry in terms of power and geopolitics was clear and immutable. In many respects, this gradually led to a considerable convergence of interests for both countries, particularly under the influence of grave external circumstances. For several reasons, however, this congruency was not something they desired.¹

This study aims to analyse the course of cooperation in military intelligence and, based on this investigation, to identify the main characteristics, trends, and substantial influences that moulded it and determined its outcomes. Another fundamental question is whether this cooperation could have had mutually equivalent benefits when it was conducted by two entities with different capabilities and traditions. For the purposes of interpreting the value of the results of this cooperation, the study applies the method of critically comparing informational gains with reality.

1 The following are basic historiographical works on relations between France and Czechoslovakia in the interwar period: WANDY CZ, Piotr S.: *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919–1925. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1962; SAME AUTHOR: *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 1988; LACAZE, Yvon: *France and Munich. A Study of Decision Making in International Affairs*. Columbia University Press, Boulder – New York 1995, and KVAČEK, Robert: *Obtížné spojení. Politicko-diplomatické vztahy mezi Francií a Československem 1937–1938* (Difficult Alliance. Political and Diplomatic Relations Between France and Czechoslovakia 1937–1938). Charles University, Prague 1989.

Czechoslovak-French cooperation on military intelligence was an intrinsically structured and relatively broad topic. It gradually took shape in three areas. The first represented military intelligence in the general sense. It is possible to define this as the acquisition and sharing of information and the processing of data on the extent and multilateral characteristics of Germany's military potential. The second area was tied to cooperation on military aviation. One of its segments consisted of sharing specialised information on the German air force and the targets of air-raids by units whose specialised mobilisation structure and operational deployment was anticipated by the F-T-A convention of 1 July 1935 and its modifications in the years 1935–1938. The third area concerned the issue of mutually integrating both allied states in peacetime and during mobilisation, which military intelligence units participated in to a considerable extent. This study primarily focuses on the first area mentioned, which tells the most about the outcomes of reciprocal intelligence relationships in the widest possible extent.

In existing historiography, minimal special attention has been devoted to Czechoslovak-French intelligence cooperation.² Among other things, the defined topic is specific, particularly in terms of the conditions for heuristics. It concerns the activities of the two intelligence units of the relevant armies, but only the French sources have more comprehensive and relatively well-preserved material. In view of the heavy shredding of Czechoslovak intelligence's written materials, which took place in the years 1938–1939, sources in France replace the missing sources of Czechoslovak provenance to a considerable extent. Consequently, in working on this topic it is necessary to constantly be cognisant of the objectively given imbalance of the sources. Under the conditions that have been outlined, the archive collections administered by the history division of the French Defence Ministry in Vincennes³ represent the only possibility and also a unique opportunity to become acquainted with the nature of the subject in question. A relevant part of this is the fact that several valuable resources of Czechoslovak origin have been preserved in the French language and to a lesser extent in Czech, which were irrevocably destroyed in their country of origin. Under these conditions, sources on the given topic that have been preserved in the Czech Republic are of a complementary nature because they are very fragmentary. The objective state of the source materials, however, also influenced the outcome of working on the subject in the sense that this study somewhat emphasises the results

2 To date, only the following publications deal substantially with the given subject: STRAKA, Karel: *Československé a francouzské vojenské zpravodajství v letech 1933–1938 /Czechoslovak and French Military Intelligence in the Years 1933–1938/*. *Historie a vojenství /History and Military Affairs/*, 2009, Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 32–65. Most recently and in a wider context, the following presents substantial information on the given issue: SAME AUTHOR: *Rekonstrukce československé agenturní sítě a jejích výsledků z let 1933–1939 /The Reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Agent Network and Its Results in the Years 1933–1939/*. Ministerstvo obrany ČR – VĚÚ, Prague 2017. See also FORCADE, Olivier: *La république secrète. Histoire des services spéciaux français de 1918 à 1939*. Nouveau Monde édition, Paris 2008, pp. 251–265. The last work cited only notes the operational intelligence aspects of mutual contacts and thus it almost completely passes over the analytical component.

3 Service historique de la Défense, Vincennes.

Karel Straka

of Czechoslovak intelligence during the collaboration in question. This is primarily down to the fact that the relevant documentation of French provenance on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia has not been preserved to the same extent as Czechoslovak materials in France. Seeking out French documentation that was transferred to Czechoslovakia in the enormously extensive wealth of French sources is an extraordinarily long and difficult process. The efforts expended, however, still don't guarantee an adequate outcome.

After 28 October 1918, the Czechoslovak Army began building up its informational apparatus without external help or participation. The influence of the French Military Mission soon began to assert itself in the Czechoslovak Republic, however. Under these circumstances, entities very quickly began to form, which with certain modifications represented the presence of French military intelligence in Czechoslovakia virtually until 1939. It is possible to distinguish two lines of French intelligence activity. The first was the French Military Mission (FMM) in the Czechoslovak Republic, which arrived in Prague on 13 February 1919. In the spring and summer of the same year, it integrated organisationally with the military division of the Ministry of National Defence and in this way formed the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces (originally known as the "Generální štáb" in Czech it became the "Hlavní štáb" as of September 1920). From the point of view of the issue at hand, the essential thing is that its second (intelligence) division became the basis for the same division of the General Staff.⁴ Major Marcel Ihler, an FMM officer, became the first head of the second Czechoslovak (intelligence) division. The French staff were later completely replaced by intelligence officers from the Czechoslovak armed forces, who had been trained and had acquired the necessary specialist experience in the meantime.⁵

In terms of knowledge of Germany, Czechoslovak military intelligence relied especially on information originating from the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control until the second half of the 1920s. Until 1927, it oversaw the fulfilment of the military, naval, and aviation clauses of the fifth section of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 28 June 1919. Thanks to this, the supply of essential information in the years 1919–1927 was ensured by the French military intelligence delegation in Prague. At the end of the 1920s, proximity to Germany became a de facto passive front from an intelligence point of view. After 1926, Czechoslovak military intelligence stifled the anti-German focus that had previously been asserted by the French. The focal point of its work primarily became the information battle with Hungarian revisionism. Under these circumstances, intelligence contacts with the French were reduced to the enduring contact via the French Military Mission.⁶

4 A memorandum titled *Dějiny ministerstva národní obrany* /History of the Ministry of National Defence/ (duplicated typescript). Ministerstvo národní obrany (Ministry of National Defence), Prague (undated), pp. 54–55.

5 TITL, Zdeněk: *Rekonstrukce vývoje organizační struktury a personálií československého výzvědného zpravodajství (do 15. března 1939). Studijní pomůcka* /A Reconstruction of the Development of the Organisational Structure and Personal Data of Czechoslovak Reconnaissance Intelligence (up to 15 March 1939). Study Aid/. Generální štáb, Inspektorát vojenské zpravodajské služby AČR, Prague 1995, pp. 2–4.

6 More details on this period can be found in FORCADE, Olivier: *La république secrète*, pp. 253–255.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

The second line of activity reflected the immediate presence of a French military intelligence foothold on Czechoslovak territory. This had already been installed in Prague in November 1918. It was activated by Professor Louis Eisenman, who taught at the Sorbonne and specialised in Central European issues. In accordance with French strategy at the time, the attention of this strategic foothold was focused primarily on Germany. The secondary interest covered Austria and Hungary. A separate intelligence station was established in Vienna which was subordinate to the Prague workplace. For reasons of intelligence defence, this entity was incorporated into the French Military Mission in 1926. Intelligence officers who worked in this capacity officially acted as military aviation attachés in Prague. From 1919, Major Bertrand Pujo (1919–1923), Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Gudin du Pavillon (1923–1926), Major Fernand Cochet (1926–1932), and Captain Jean-Eugène Poupard (1932–1934) were rotated in this position. These men obtained the right from the Parisian head office to recruit agents and they ensured ciphered radio communication between Prague and Paris.

The method for the Prague representation of the French Intelligence Service (*Service de renseignement*) was modified by agreement on 20 January 1934. On this basis, a *Poste mixte* (Mixed Post) was established which took over its remit from the military aviation attaché at the French Military Mission. From the beginning right up to the breakup of the republic, the French Intelligence Service was represented at this work station by Major Henri Gouyou, a reserve intelligence officer with the French Army. Initially, the two armies participated equally in financing the activity of the *Poste mixte*. In July 1935, the *Poste mixte* was renamed as *Poste de liaison* (Liaison Post). French financial participation ended by mutual agreement in view of the increase in the frequency of both countries' intelligence contacts. Instead of co-financing operations, a principle was established whereby both parties each covered a 50 percent share in monetary remunerations for people who supplied agency material. This new arrangement was confirmed in June 1936.⁷ The actual intelligence experience of 1938 showed that this method of permanent representation for the French Intelligence Service in Czechoslovakia was satisfactory in times of peace, but not during an escalation in tensions when an increased continuous flow of information became a necessity. Under these circumstances, the French Military Mission also ceased to have sufficient capacities and so two missions were dispatched in the spring of 1938 which were essentially auxiliary liaison missions.⁸

Initial hopes and the results of joint efforts (1933–1935)

In terms of military intelligence, Czechoslovak-French relations shifted to a new qualitative level due to the events of 1932–1933. In October 1932, the foreign minister Edvard Beneš held discussions with the chief of the General Staff, General Jan

7 *Service historique de la Défense* (SHD)/*Département de l'Armée de Terre* (DAT), 7 N 2682, dossier (d.) 4, Annexe aux Status du P. M., 1 mai 1936.

8 *Ibid.*, 7 N 3103, *L'Activité de la mission militaire concernant la recherche des renseignements*, début janvier 1938.

Karel Straka

Syrový, on the future anticipated capabilities of neighbouring revisionist states to wage a war. These talks had been engendered by adverse developments at the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments in Geneva.⁹ Based on this, as early the spring of the same year Beneš voiced the traditionally cited prognosis that it was possible to expect a serious European crisis within four years.¹⁰ Concerns were sparked by Germany's efforts to achieve weapons parity, which was interpreted as the basis for German preparations to unleash a conflict. The subjective feeling that a threat was imminent, which held sway at the time, was based on the theoretical assumption of the second department of the General Staff that the first operation of a future war would focus on the elimination of Czechoslovakia by German forces. The possibility of Hungarian and Austrian forces participating was also entertained. The rationale given for an attack on the republic at the start of a conflict was that it would significantly damage the anti-revisionist coalition, which would be handicapped right at the beginning of a war by the destruction of a strategically important foothold in Central Europe. One thing that was crucial to further developments was Beneš's call for Syrový to get in touch with his French counterpart, General Maurice Gustav Gamelin, so as to jointly assess future threats that had been flagged by current events and to propose suitable measures for countering them.¹¹ Syrový submitted a proposal to Gamelin to this effect with an explicit reference to special letters that both countries' foreign ministers had exchanged on 26 and 30 January 1924 and which anticipated precisely such consultative meetings in the event of an increase in the threat faced by both countries.¹²

Both senior military officers discussed the issues in question during Syrový's strictly confidential sojourn in Paris in 28–31 January 1933. They agreed on the assumption that any possible military conflict in Central Europe would undoubtedly escalate into a war that would affect the entire continent.¹³ The significance of the Paris meeting stems from two fundamental decisions that were made at its conclusion. The first concerned the immediate commencement of operational and technical cooperation between the air forces of both armies with the focus being on preparations against Germany, and the second involved military intelligence cooperation primarily targeting the same country of interest.¹⁴ Strategic cooperation between both armies in military aviation was revived because the deployment of an air force had been considered the quickest way of beginning coalition coordination since the 1920s.¹⁵ Through the results of its work, intelligence was supposed to ensure the necessary foundation

9 Ibid., 7 N 3109, Mission militaire française, 15 novembre 1932.

10 See BENEŠ, Edvard: *Paměti I. Mnichovské dny* / Memoirs I. The Days of Munich / (editor: Milan Hauner). Academia, Prague 2008, p. 127.

11 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3107, d. 1, Note sur les éventualités de conflits européens possibles, 26 janvier 1933.

12 Ibid., Entretiens militaires franco-tchécoslovaques, 29 décembre 1932; Faucher à Daladier, 12 janvier 1933; SHD/DAT, 7 N 3109, Note du général Faucher, 28 décembre 1932.

13 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3446, d. 2, Conversations franco-tchécoslovaques janvier 1933. Entretien du 28, 30, 31 janvier.

14 Ibid., Conversations franco-tchécoslovaques janvier 1933. Entretien du 31 janvier.

15 Ibid., Procès-verbal de la conférence tenue à Prague le 11 janvier 1924.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

for the operational activity of the air force. Two important partial conclusions can be gleaned from the facts outlined above. The first is that from the outset intelligence cooperation was based on the needs of operational preparations for coalition aviation activity. The second concerns the fact that the new phase of cooperation between both armies was not prompted by the Nazi threat, but by the preceding revisionism of Weimar Germany.

The focus of intelligence cooperation took shape in Prague in the period from 27 April to 4 May 1933. General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Marie-Louis Koeltz, the head of the second division of the General Staff, Major Louis Moutte and Major Louis Koenig-Belliard de Vaubicourt, both from the Air Ministry, were in the Czech capital on official business. For the time being, the approved principles concerned informational activities with respect to the needs of the air force. This means that the principal focus of attention was on potential targets of aerial bombardment on the one hand and the progress being made by the German air force on the other. Nonetheless, these negotiations paved the way for further information cooperation, which soon began to cover the entire military potential of Nazi Germany.¹⁶

In the course of intelligence contacts from the years 1933–1935, it's possible to identify and document an interesting phenomenon. While French intelligence had clearly emphasised Germany as a priority country for its information efforts since 1918, the shift in the focus of Czechoslovak intelligence interests from Hungary to Germany had still not been definitively decided in 1933. The French intelligence system already had a stable reconnaissance apparatus at its disposal against the Reich in 1933. Czechoslovak intelligence had only just built the necessary structures, mainly in terms of constructing an agency network. Through its results, however, it soon proved capable of flexibly adapting and being able to begin intensively working in a new strategic direction. The first relevant reports that Czechoslovak military intelligence provided to its French partners in June 1934 conclusively illustrate this fact. It involved an extraordinarily weighty paper. The basis for the treatise consisted of a studied titled *Říšsko-německé branné problémy* (German Reich Defence Issues), which offered a detailed critical analysis of Germany's military situation and how it had developed in the preceding period with an emphasis on events after January 1933. The content of this output was developed in further detail by four extensive appendices. The first examined the development of the organisation of border defence and the defence of state territory as a whole. The second focused especially on the organisation of the *Grenzschutz* and *Landesschutz*. The third provided a complete and detailed analysis of the German field army, i.e. the *Reichswehr*, in its anticipated mobilised structure. And the fourth dealt with the *Reichswehr's* armament programme. Three components of the paper were the most important: a detailed analysis of the Reich Defence Ministry's plan for the reorganisation of the peacetime army from 1932 and copies of the original wording of the German Reich documentation. The first reproduced a document with the heading *Entwurf des Reichswehrministe-*

16 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3447, d. 1, Rapport au sujet des conditions de la collaboration des aviations tchécoslovaque et française, 4 mai 1933.

Karel Straka

riums (Reich Defence Ministry Proposal) and the second was titled Weisungen für die Reichsverteidigung vom 1. Juli 1933 (Directives for the Defence of the Reich, dated 1 July 1933).

The Reich Defence Ministry's plan for the reorganisation of the peacetime army was focused on organisation and personnel. The Czechoslovak analysis of this programme, however, also used the German army's armament programme label. The reason for this was that it was attempting to identify the Reichswehr's overall armament programme via the plan to reorganise the peacetime army. It can be deduced from the data provided that the programme covered three extensive activities. Besides the aforementioned reorganisation of the peacetime army, which the analysis had the most information about, it also involved the gradual recruitment and preparation of reserves for the mobilisational replenishment of a wartime field army and forces for the defence of state borders, collectively called Grenzschutz-Ost¹⁷. Along with the two areas concerning organisation and personnel that have been mentioned, a third area was also added: ensuring weaponry and materiel for a wartime field army and Grenzschutz-Ost.¹⁸ It is clear from the document that the wartime field army was supposed to consist of 21 divisions and the Grenzschutz-Ost, which was meant to comprise 34 divisions. However, these were supposed to have a structure that was different to that of the Reichswehr divisions. The document also contained data on the implementation timetable for the overall arms programme. It was meant to have been carried out over five years, specifically from 1 April 1933 to 31 March 1938. In the event of favourable circumstances, the timetable also envisaged the possibility of an accelerated implementation.¹⁹

Czechoslovak military intelligence had penetrated the essence of the so-called second armament programme of the Reichswehr from 1932. In summary, it's possible to state that it had been objectively informed correctly of all the decisive aims of the programme. The Czechoslovak analysis corresponded to the reality of the situation on the date the first measures were launched on 1 April 1933. A key moment in the process of building the Reichswehr occurred shortly before the end of 1933. This was when the so-called December programme was established, which aimed to already implement a substantial part of the original project from 1932 by 1935. In the spring of 1934, Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler stepped up pressure to speed up the programme as quickly as possible. Czechoslovak analysts gradually became convinced that the 21 peacetime divisions would be put together a lot sooner than the programme anticipated. In their opinion, this could be achieved by the first quarter of 1936 at the

17 Grenzschutz-Ost a paramilitary organisation that existed in Germany from the beginning of the 1920s. It was intended to defend state borders with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and in Eastern Prussia. In 1936, it was replaced by the Grenzschutz, subordinate to the Wehrmacht, which covered all Germany's borders.

18 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 2, a copy of the Czech wording of extensive analytical material, č. j. (ref. no.) 903 Taj. – hl. št./2. odděl. (Secret – General Staff/second department) 1934, dated 15 October 1934 – Výzbrojní program německé armády (rozbor dokumentu) /The Armament Programme of the German Army (document analysis)/.

19 See also *Ibid.*, d. 3, Évolution des préparatifs de guerre allemands, 6 février 1935.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

latest. A warning was issued in connection with this that general conscription would in all likelihood be introduced by October 1935. This was a remarkably accurate prediction of a fact that actually occurred in March 1935.

Nonetheless, it is also necessary to acknowledge the extraordinary importance of the materials that Czech intelligence operatives managed to obtain copies of. Their contents fundamentally changed how the military-political situation in Germany was portrayed in terms of preparations for waging a future war. The document titled *Entwurf des Reichwehrministeriums* literally reproduced a draft of a basic directive from the Reich Defence Ministry. It was the means by which this department intended to introduce the concept of a comprehensive defence of German sovereign territory against any attack by land, air, or sea. A copy of another document allowed for the subsequent society-wide militarisation of Germany under the Nazi regime to be monitored. It was called *Weisungen für die Reichsverteidigung vom 1. Juli 1933* (see above). It was clear from this document that the Nazi regime was first securing itself against any external intervention so that it would later be capable of switching to the role of an aggressor.

The first comparison of Czechoslovak and French intelligence data occurred on 11 July 1934 in Paris within the framework of a bilateral conference, during which the military potential of Hitler's Germany was evaluated along with how Czechoslovakia's defence strategy should adapt to it. Discussions took place on 11–12 July. At the level of chiefs of General Staff and intelligence department heads, the boom in German armament and the construction of the Reichswehr since the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933 was reviewed. Both sides were of the same opinion that for the time Germany was not yet capable of an offensive to the west and east simultaneously. The first issue dealt with was whether the SA (*Sturmabteilungen*) formation could take part in the Reichswehr's offensive operations. The massive size of this organisation was staggering: it had 20 times the permitted peacetime levels of the Reichswehr. The SA's numbers reached a peak in the summer of 1934, when it had 2.9 million men.²⁰ Despite this, as regards the defence of France, it was stated that the SA was not capable of an effective offensive deployment against the country. This belief no longer held sway when it came to Czechoslovakia.

The talks on 11 July also explored the issue of how much force Germany would be capable of deploying against Czechoslovakia. Two eventualities were considered. If the Germans were to deploy a substantial portion of their forces against France, operations of local significance would be the biggest threat facing Czechoslovakia. If, however, Czechoslovakia were to become the central focus of an operation, General Gamelin described the distribution of Germany's formations in the following manner: From Germany's point of view, it considered it necessary to deploy five-to-six divisions on its western borders, which would have to halt any French auxiliary attack on the Rhineland. Three divisions would be left in Eastern Prussia. According to the intelligence information, Gamelin anticipated that another three divisions would re-

20 From the abundant amount of literature on the SA, see the following in particular: BENNECKE, Heinrich: *Hitler und die SA*. Günter Olzog Verlag, München – Wien 1962.

Karel Straka

main in strategic reserve so that it would be possible to deploy them in the event of a military operation in Poland. It was assumed, however, that this country would remain neutral. Furthermore, 12 divisions would remain against Czechoslovakia, which could be reinforced by parts of the Grenzschutz-Ost and this would increase the mass of offensive forces. Nonetheless, he also pointed to 20 Czechoslovak divisions, whose strength in his opinion would form a reliable barrier against the Reichswehr.

Following up on Gamelin's analysis, Ludvík Krejčí, the chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces, concurred insofar as the given facts concerned the current situation by indicating that the Reichswehr would definitely increase in strength. He stated, however, that the enemy was not yet capable of posing a serious threat on all sections of the Czechoslovak-German state borders at the same time. He identified crushing blows coming from Austria and Silesia as the most serious threat. Nonetheless, from the point of view of the attacker, this would require absolute certainty with respect to Polish neutrality as well as Austria's involvement. Gamelin emphasised that holding the Czech lands was the most important task for Czechoslovak defence and that it was of equal importance to both Czechoslovakia and France. The focal point of an active strategic defence was supposed to be on the front against Germany.²¹ These Paris talks led to fundamental changes in the Czechoslovak defence strategy. The Prague General Staff began to definitively view Germany as the source of the most potentially serious threat.

A relatively short time afterwards, the work in countering Germany produced other important results. General Staff Colonel Šimon Drgáč, the chief of the second department of the Czechoslovak General Staff, personally presented these results in Paris when he was staying there in February 1935. He was accompanied by General Staff Major Bohumil Procházka, the head officer of the German section of group A the analysis and planning of the second department of the General Staff. The core and essence of the extraordinary communications consisted of key data on a comprehensive programme for the organisational construction of the German military air force for the years 1934–1936. After obtaining this information, Czechoslovak military intelligence was objectively capable of predicting the development and the anticipated strategic importance of completely new German aviation weaponry with the level of accuracy generally afforded by applying the operational and analytical methods of working with agency information. Based on a comparison of data from this material with verified and trustworthy information on real historical facts, it is possible to conclude that the report was based on the most important programme documents of the Reich Air Ministry. Based on intelligence information as of 1 October 1936, i.e. the completion date for the initial stages of construction, the target level was supposed to amount to 93 flights (without the marine air force).²² In fact, the Luftwaffe had 108 flights as of the given date. The difference between the intelligence materials and

21 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3446, d. 2, Conference tenue le 11 juillet entre le général Krejci et le général Gamelin, 11 juillet 1934.

22 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 3, Liaison à Paris février 1935, Plán budování německého vojenského letectva 1934–1936 /The Plan to Build German Military Air Force 1934–1936/, original material originating from the second department of the Czechoslovak General Staff.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

the reality of the situation was due to an increase in the number of spotter and long distance reconnaissance flights. In the case of fighter, bomber, and dive-bomber flights, the intelligence information precisely covered not only the existing programme of the Reich Aviation Ministry, but also the reality that was achieved.²³

For the French partners, these communications undoubtedly became a welcome source of information. What matters here is the context. Since mid-1934, French military intelligence had been coming to terms with the loss of its last valuable agent with access to documentary material, which it had relied upon up to then in regard to German aviation. Consequently, its subsequent conclusions were more or less based on well-founded estimates.²⁴ It is therefore no wonder that, when the head of the French second department, General Staff Colonel Koeltz, learned of the extraordinary findings obtained by agents of Prague's second department in the field of aviation at a meeting of Little Entente chiefs of staff in the Czechoslovak capital in November 1934, he declared that such information would be worth its weight in gold to the French intelligence apparatus.²⁵

General Staff Colonel Drgáč and General Staff Major Procházka also brought other substantial materials to Paris. This consisted of a generally focused study from 5 February 1935. It concerned an updated version of a comprehensive report from June 1934 that had already been analysed. A comprehensive analysis of reports on individual types of weapons and services culminated in a qualified estimate of overall Reichswehr numbers. In this document, an analysis by the Czechoslovak second department estimated these figures at 250,000–300,000 men. This corresponded admirably with the real numbers. Recognised scholarly findings for the given period put the figure at 250,000 men. A set of 13 material appendices contained a number of details, usually comprising organisational charts of higher units of the German defence organisation. The most important of these documented the composition of each of the seven military districts (Wehrkreis I–VII). Appendix XII was especially significant. It described the organisation of the Reich Defence Ministry in detail according to the findings as of 1 August 1934. Summaries with a closing statement as of 1 January 1935 were comprehensive in nature. They depicted the Reich-wide organisation of the SA and the SS as well as the staffing of the Office of Military Policy at the national level of the Nazi Party (Wehrpolitisches Amt bei der Reichsleitung der NSDAP). A Reichswehr document with organisational, deployment, and material details about artillery regiments 1–7 was also useful.²⁶

23 Cf. VÖLKER, Karl-Heinz (ed.): *Dokumente und Dokumentarfotos zur Geschichte der deutschen Luftwaffe*. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt – Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1968, Dok. No. 84, pp. 201–204.

24 This fact is also backed up by JACKSON, Peter: *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making 1933–1939*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 93. See also SAME AUTHOR: French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power. *Historical Journal*, 1998, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 795–824.

25 See *Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv* (Central Military Archive – Military History Archive, hereafter referred to as VÚA – VHA), f. (fund) VKPR (Military Office of the President of the Republic), Box 7, č. j. T 32 – A VKPR report on Germany's preparations for war dated 20 December 1934.

26 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 3, Liaison à Paris février 1935.

Karel Straka

In mid-May 1935, the French Military Mission in the Czechoslovak Republic arranged the handover of another extensive and detailed synthesis. The intelligence department of the Czechoslovak General Staff called it *Vojenské formace NSDAP* (Nazi Party Military Formations) with the subheading *According to Reports up to 15 April 1935*. It comprehensively examined the SA, SS and NSKK²⁷. It provided details of their organisation, training, material provisions, replenishment, and numbers. It also dealt with the political importance and military value of the SA and this entity's relationship with the Reichswehr.²⁸ The opinions of both departments concurred with respect to the rise of the SS at the expense of the SA as a result of events from the middle of the previous year (the Night of the Long Knives, 29–30 June 1934). Among other things, this indicated that developments in the Reich were fast moving toward the transformation of the Reichswehr into a massive standard-type army. It was therefore becoming increasingly clear that the possibility of developments moving in the direction of a political militia army as envisaged by the SA leadership had become a thing of the past. This, however, did not change the fact that a large pool of reserves for defensive use remained in place. And the size of this pool of reserves was where differences of opinion arose between the analysts of both armies. Czechoslovak intelligence reckoned that the SA amounted to 700,000 men. This would have reflected a radical decline in their numbers which was supposed to have occurred after the crackdown against the SA at the end of June 1934. The French, on the other hand, came up with the alternative figure of 1 million. Their calculation was closer to the objective reality of the situation.²⁹ The SA still numbered 1,200,000 men in 1938.³⁰ The opposite occurred in the case of the SS, however. The Czechoslovak analysis estimated that they numbered 170,000–200,000 men. The French calculated this figure to be 210,000–220,000.³¹ In objective terms, the SS amounted to 165,000 men in the middle of 1935.³²

A lot changed quickly in the second half of May 1935, during which analysts in Paris were carefully studying the above-mentioned report from Prague. On 16 March 1935, the German Reich's government announced the introduction of general compulsory military service. Without being restricted by sanctions, it began intensively building up the German armed forces. In the future, these were meant to consist of 12 army corps with 36 divisions divided among them. The strategic situation in Europe had thereby begun to fundamentally change. A turning point in Czechoslovakia occurred on 15 July 1935. In terms of working with information of strategic value, two events gave this date a certain watershed significance.

A materially substantive conversation between General Louis-Eugène Faucher, the head of the French Military Mission, and Dr. Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovak

27 NSKK – Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps (The National Socialist Motor Corps).

28 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 3, Formations militaires NSDAP, 15 avril 1935.

29 *Ibid.*, Étude de la synthèse, 1 juin 1935.

30 For the development of SA numbers during the 1930s, see GRÜTTNER, Michael: *Das Dritte Reich 1933–1939*. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2014, p. 125.

31 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 3, Étude de la synthèse, 1 juin 1935.

32 See GRÜTTNER, Michael: *Brandstifter und Biedermänner. Deutschland 1933–1939*. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2015, p. 115.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

foreign minister, took place in Prague. At that time, the second of these officials was already extensively and extraordinarily well informed of the situation regarding the defence of the state. Since October 1933, he had been on the board of the Supreme State Defence Council. Faucher summarised Beneš's opinions in a top-secret letter, in which he notified General Gamelin of Beneš's assessment of the current situation and future developments, which was worded as follows: *I do not believe there is any immediate danger. I think that we have around 18 months available to us at the very least. The Germans cannot consider their organisation to be sufficient, particularly in terms of personnel (officers).*³³ He admitted the possibility of a German operation with the deployment of the Wehrmacht roughly from the beginning of 1937.

It is evidently not entirely coincidental that the Prague second department produced a closing statement of aggregate data on the development of the Wehrmacht from March to the aforementioned 15 July. In that time, almost two months had elapsed since the announcement of the Reich Defence Law of 21 May 1935, which took effect on the following day. An analysis weighing up the issues, which contained a general breakdown of the aforementioned law on defence, an examination of the current organisation of ground troops, and predictions for their future organisation, found its way to Paris from Prague. An important appendix described the organisation of the General Staff of ground forces, which was valid as of 1 July 1935. Of the basic characteristics of the law, particular attention was drawn to the extreme freedom that was given to the Reich defence minister in regard to the extent of compulsory military service in wartime. The law defined it in Article 1, Paragraph 1 as a so-called honourable service to the German people. This legal norm had been prepared in such a way that no new laws needed to be adopted in this respect when it came to possible amendments.

Intelligence cooperation in 1935 culminated in a conference that took place in Paris on 6–7 December. Colonel Drgáč led the Czechoslovak delegation. It was primarily Major Procházka who commented on expert details. A representative of the third (operational) department was also present (along with three other assisting officers from the Czechoslovak General Staff). This was the first of regular intelligence conferences, which took place by agreement on intelligence relationships and were laid out in the F-T-A aviation convention of 1 July 1935. In this instance the fragmentary composition of the sources that have been preserved only allows us to state with any certainty that the Czechoslovak delegation presented its French partners with a list of the higher bodies of the Wehrmacht's system of reserves that had been ascertained to date, an overview of the Grenzschutz-Ost's top regional organisations, and a list of military training camps and shooting ranges.³⁴

33 SHD/DAT, papiers Gamelin – 1K 224/15, d. 3, Faucher à Gamelin, Entretien avec Monsieur le Ministre Beneš, 17 juillet 1935.

34 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 3, Liaison à Paris les 6 et 7 décembre 1935.

Karel Straka

Sharing of reports on future threats in the context of international crises (1936–1937)

In January 1936, the intelligence units of both allied armies were on the threshold of an extraordinarily difficult year. Another intelligence conference was held on 3–5 March. By agreement from the previous year, it took place in Prague and those who travelled there included General Staff Colonel Henri Roux, the chief of the Intelligence Service, General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Henri Gauché, the head of the second department of the General Staff, and General Staff Major Joseph Martin Gallevier de Mierry, the leading officer of the German section of the second department of the General Staff.³⁵ These officers became acquainted with General Staff Colonel František Hájek, the new head of the second department of the Czechoslovak General Staff since the start of the year. The turbulent nature of the times was apparent in the fact that some extraordinary news caught up with the French delegation on 7 March on the homeward journey from Prague via Vienna.³⁶ German troops entered the demilitarised zone in the Rhineland on that day. This event, however, didn't come as a surprise to either side. They had been expecting it for a long time. Since as far back as 1933, they had not been asking whether such a thing would happen, but when it would occur.

A system of intelligence questionnaires that had been precisely formulated in advance began to be applied at conferences. Each of the partnership organisations drew up their own questionnaire. The clear direction and material nature of the talks was determined using this method. Both units were interested in the current size of the Wehrmacht in terms of its numbers and the quantity of formations. A questionnaire prepared by the French on 22 February 1936 said it amounted to 450,000–480,000 men (220,000–230,000 of whom were long-serving or professional soldiers, which accounted for around 45–48 %). The Czechoslovak analysis estimated the strength of the Wehrmacht at up to 550,000 men according to the situation as of the autumn of 1935. A smaller difference existed in terms of officer counts. The French estimated their number based on various calculations to be around 9,500, whereas the Czechoslovak analysis estimated it to be 9,000.³⁷ The objective reality was such that, in the autumn of 1935, the Wehrmacht had 400,000 armed men, meaning that the French estimate was much closer to the actual number. As of 15 October, 6,553 officers were on active service, meaning that both sides had clearly overcalculated this category.³⁸

There was a notable difference in the conclusions reached on the number of already existing divisions. The French analysis assumed that 33–36 of them had been established by October 1935. The Czechoslovak calculation came to 24 infantry di-

35 Ibid., d. 4, Gauché à Faucher, 18 janvier 1936; Gauché à Hájek (undated draft).

36 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3114, d. 1, Ordre de service, 22 février 1936.

37 Ibid., 7 N 2682, d. 4, Questionner, 22 février 1936.

38 Cf. DEIST, Willhelm – MESSERSCHMIDT, Manfred – VOLKMANN, Hans-Erich – WETTE, Wolfram: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Bd. 1 (Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der deutschen Kriegspolitik)*. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt – Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1979, pp. 419–421.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

visions, one armoured division, and two cavalry divisions, i.e. 27 altogether. Their findings were for the same period. It was anticipated, however, that the number of divisions declared by the Reich chancellor as a target in 1935 would be achieved in the course of 1936.³⁹ The Czechoslovak correctly assessed the number of infantry and cavalry divisions in objective terms, including the three newest infantry divisions, which were not established until 15 October 1935. However, it had not yet uncovered the existence of a further two armoured divisions, which had demonstrably existed as of the last given date.⁴⁰

Paris was the venue for the next intelligence conference on 2–9 June 1936. Those travelling to this event from Prague included Colonel Hájek, the head of the second department, and leading officers from group A (analysis and planning) and group B (reconnaissance). General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel František Havel led group A and General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel František Moravec led group B. Havel had Major Procházka, the leading officer of the German section at his disposal, while Moravec was accompanied by General Staff Major Oldřich Tichý by virtue of his being a leading officer of the offensive P-1 section.

During the conference proceedings, the organisation of mobilised German ground troops was examined along with the possible methods in which they could be used. The difficulty of intelligence analysis manifested itself in assessments of their mobilisation capacity. In mid-1936, the intelligence departments agreed on the idea that it they could amount to around 100 divisions. In accordance with their assumptions, this number consisted of 32 active divisions (including the three armoured divisions, which had already been detected by then), 10–20 reserve divisions, and the capacity of the Grenzschutz-Ost, which was equivalent to 50 divisions. These assumptions were far removed from the objective capabilities of the German armed forces. Both analytical sections erred in their estimate of the number of peacetime divisions. A lack of suitable materials from agents was obviously to blame for the actual situation being underestimated at that time. On the other hand, they fundamentally underestimated German mobilisation capacities in the given period.⁴¹ In the spring of 1936, peacetime Wehrmacht ground troops amounted to at least 34 infantry divisions and 3 armoured divisions, i.e. a total of 37 formations at the divisional level.⁴² In terms of possible mobilisation, as of 1 April, the General Staff of German ground forces realistically only counted on 28 divisions. According to other data, the number of top mobilised units planned in the mobilisation period 1935–1936 amounted to a total of 31 units. This was supposed to consist of 24 infantry divisions, 3 armoured

39 VÚA – VHA, f. VKPR, Box 137, č. j. 13 dův. (confidential) 1936, Přehled zpráv o německé branné moci za léta 1934/1935 /A Summary of Reports on the German Armed Forces in the Years 1934–1935/, dated 7 January 1936.

40 Cf. in particular: TESSIN, Georg: *Deutsche Verbände und Truppen 1918–1939*. Biblio Verlag, Osnabrück 1974, pp. 229–231; JENTZ, Thomas L.: *Panzertruppen. The Complete Guide to the Creation & Combat Employment of Germany's Tank Force, Part 1*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., Atglen 1996, pp. 19–21.

41 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Échange de renseignements sur l'armée allemande (undated).

42 For conclusive facts, see TESSIN, Georg: *Deutsche Verbände und Truppen 1918–1939*, pp. 229–231, and JENTZ, Thomas L.: *Panzertruppen*, pp. 19–22.

Karel Straka

divisions, 2 cavalry divisions, 1 cavalry brigade and 1 mountain brigade. It is necessary to point out, however, that the last data most likely illustrates a theoretical-planning perspective rather than the realistic mobilisation potential as of mid-1936. According to a decision from the autumn of 1936, only four reserve divisions were counted on up until the mobilisation year of 1936–1937. It was primarily prerequisites of a material nature that were lacking in Germany for the construction of the number of reserve units that Czechoslovak and French analysts had been using in their calculations.⁴³

Czechoslovak military intelligence had continuously informed its French allies of the results of its agency penetration with respect to modern armed defence forces. In the first half of 1936, a summary of data on the motorisation of German ground forces up to that point was produced in Prague. Two important studies were conducted on this topic. The first was from 10 March and was passed on to Paris via the French Military Mission. The second was brought to Paris by the Czechoslovak delegation, who passed it on to their allies at the June conference.⁴⁴

Besides the air force, the Czechoslovak General Staff rightly understood that motorised and mechanized units would play a decisive role in the rapid waging of a war. It shared a report with its French counterpart titled *Syntéza o motorizaci v německém pozemním vojsku (do 30. dubna 1936)* (Synthesis of Motorisation in German Ground Forces up to 30 April 1936). This was presented in Paris within the framework of the June conference. A comparison of the content of this document with the verified reality of the situation demonstrates the ability of the Czechoslovak secret service to penetrate the deeper organisational layers of tank divisions. Generally speaking, it can be said that their main combat components were successfully identified up to the platoon grade.⁴⁵

While organisational developments could be successfully monitored, the situation was different when it came to armament. This is a striking fact in the case of tank numbers. The conclusions of the Czechoslovak analysis indicated that German ground forces had 1,683 tanks in their arsenal by the end of April. This was one and a half times more than the actual situation in comparison with the verified number, which amounted to 1,065 machines as of 1 April. Production capacity in this armament segment was estimated to be up to 200 vehicles per month. The actual capacity, however, was 60–80 machines per month.⁴⁶

43 Similarly DEIST, Wilhelm – MESSERSCHMIDT, Manfred – VOLKMANN, Hans-Erich – WETTE, Wolfram: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Bd. 1*, pp. 415–431. Cf. MUELLER-HILLEBRAND, B.: *Das Heer 1933–1945. Bd. 1 (Das Heer bis zum Kriegsbeginn)*. E. S. Mittler & Sohn, Darmstadt 1954, pp. 57–59.

44 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Renseignements sur la motorisation de l'armée allemande, mars 1936; Synthèse sur la motorisation dans l'armée allemande (au 30 avril 1936) – a French version of the report, č. j. 8951 dŮv. – hl. št./2. odděl. 1936.

45 Ibid., Synthèse sur la motorisation dans l'armée allemande (au 30 avril 1936) – č. j. 8951 dŮv. – hl. št./2. odděl. 1936. Cf. ideally with JENTZ, Thomas L.: *Panzertruppen*, pp. 11–22.

46 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Synthèse sur la motorisation dans l'armée allemande (au 30 avril 1936) – č. j. 8951 dŮv. – hl. št./2. odděl. 1936. Cf. JENTZ, Thomas L.: *Panzertruppen*, pp. 48–50.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

The intelligence conference that took place in Prague on 3–6 November 1936⁴⁷ was in keeping with the already established practice of regular meetings. General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Gauché, the head of the second department of the French General Staff, came to the Czechoslovak capital with an assisting officer from the same department, as did General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre Louis Rivet, the new chief of the Intelligence Service, who was accompanied by Captain André Antoine Perruche, who had been entrusted with handling the issue of Nazi Germany.⁴⁸ Discussions proceeded in accordance with pre-prepared thematic areas: I. the rearmament of Germany; II. the military training of ground forces in the organisational and operational sense; III. the effectifs of ground troops; IV. the military preparations of the air force and ground-troop defences against aircraft in the organisational and operational sense; V. chemical-warfare preparations; and VI. armed corps and paramilitary organisations.

Czechoslovak intelligence officers used a number of basic materials during meetings on individual topics. They gave their French colleagues high-quality photocopies of documents from extensive underground exercises in Bavaria. These took place in the Gruppenkommando 2 district. This material was inherently significant for understanding German military doctrine.⁴⁹ The Czechoslovak second department had already produced an informationally very extensive study under the name *Zbrojní služba v německém pozemním vojsku (podle zpráv do konce srpna 1936)* (Armed Service in German Ground Forces (According to Reports by the End of April 1936)).⁵⁰ A copy of an exceptional document was completely extraordinary. In the heading it bore the title *Planstudie*. It concerned a plan of mobilisation exercises for six Landwehr infantry regiments from a section of roughly 200 kilometres between Görlitz in Upper Lusatia (known as *Zhořelec* in Czech, in the Federal Republic of Germany) and Neisse (originally *Neiße*, today known as *Nysa*, in the Polish Republic).⁵¹ A report formulated by the Czechoslovak second department under the name *Německé přípravy z hlediska chemické války 1936* (German Preparations from the Point of View of Chemical Warfare 1936) was comprehensive in nature. In this paper, group A summarised all existing knowledge on this issue. Besides documents on organisational, deployment, developmental, production, and doctrinal matters, the study also contained documentation on the ownership structure, capital security, and organisation of the I. G. Farben concern.⁵²

The dramatic year of 1936 had not yet finished when Czechoslovak military intelligence obtained via its agency substantial documents about the fact that the

47 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Programme de la conférence du 3 au 6 novembre 1936.

48 RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy* (editors: Olivier Forcade and Sébastien Laurent). Nouveau Monde édition, Paris 2010, p. 81.

49 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Manoeuvres 1936 – Gruppenkommando 2, Große Herbstübung 1936, 20 August 1936.

50 Ibid., Le Service de l'armement dans l'Armée allemande – a French version of the report, č. j. 17938 dův. – hl. št./2. odděl. 1936, September 1936 (not dated in more detail).

51 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 4, Planstudie, 30 May 1936.

52 Ibid., Préparatifs allemands en vue de la guerre chimique 1936 (not dated in more detail).

Karel Straka

leadership of the Wehrmacht had played out a General Staff game on the theme of a preventive war against Czechoslovakia. This specific type of specialist preparation by top-level staff took place within the framework of an annual trip by the top commanders of armed forces' High Command.⁵³ The essence of the documentation was a war-game theme. It was differentiated into two theatres of war because it did not just concern Central Europe, but also Western Europe. It contained the initial situation and opening operations of the competing sides, namely Germany and Czechoslovakia in Central Europe and Germany and France in the west. These source materials were accompanied by an operational and intelligence analysis of the military potential of Germany and the allied forces of Hungary together with a basic outline of the anticipated mobilisation potential of the Czechoslovak and French armies. The portion of agency material that contained details of the organisation of all types of formations of the Wehrmacht deployed in a simulated conflict in Central Europe, primarily against Czechoslovakia, had extraordinary informational value.⁵⁴

In the early days of January 1937, a copy of an agency record made its way to Paris via the Prague Poste de liaison.⁵⁵ The report represented a certain turning point on for both intelligence services, which also made its way up the chain of command to the highest levels of leadership. Lieutenant-Colonel Rivet personally mentioned it to General Gamelin on 5 January within the framework of a summary report. The communication from Czechoslovakia was the most important part of this. The chief of the Intelligence Service recorded the following in his diary: *General Gamelin ordered the acceleration of preparations in all areas.*⁵⁶ It is patently clear and natural that the report on a war game made an impression in Czechoslovakia as one of the most significant factors since the commencement of the modernisation of the defence of the state in the years 1933 and 1934. In Paris, General Staff Colonel Václav Kalina, a Czechoslovak military attaché, reported on it to the head of the second department of the General Staff of the French Army. Lieutenant-Colonel Gauché learned in January 1937 that the agency report on the game had strengthened the Czechoslovak command's conviction that Germany posed a threat and in turning the focus of its military strategy against the Third Reich.⁵⁷

53 A French translation of the original German text of the cited agency report together with an appended map has been uniquely preserved in *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2701, d. Kriegsspiel 1936, Poste de Liaison No. 22, 22 janvier 1937. For a paraphrased summary, see also *VÚA – VHA*, Fondy militáří studijního ústavu ministerstva vnitra (Collections of Military History Documents from the Study Institute of the Czech Interior Ministry, hereafter referred to as *FMSÚMV*), sign. (signature) 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl., dated 16 November 1938.

54 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2701, d. Kriegsspiel 1936, Poste de Liaison No. 22, 22 janvier 1937.

55 Cf. *VÚA – VHA*, *FMSÚMV*, sign. 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl., dated 16 November 1938. *VÚA – VHA*, f. MNO (Ministry of National Defence) – hl. št./2. odděl., Box 24 – dodatky (addenda), Přehledy o původu zpráv o cizích armádách v letech 1936–1938 – příloha č. 1 (tabulka, zpracovala plánovací a studijní skupina A 2. oddělení Hlavního štábu v lednu 1939) / Summaries of the Origin of Reports on Foreign Armies in the Years 1936–1938 – appendix no. 1 (a table, formulated by planning and study group A of the second department of the General Staff in January 1939)/.

56 See RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, p. 96.

57 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 3115, Compte-rendu (C-R), 22 janvier 1937.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

From the point of view of objectivity, it is important to state that the Czechoslovak intelligence apparatus had obtained real proof of a specific phase of the strategic planning of Nazi Germany against its neighbours, which was basically inspired by the Schooling (Schulung) of 1935 and which envisaged a preventive war against Czechoslovakia.⁵⁸ What is important is that the war game was based on so-called studies of the armed forces (Wehrmachtstudien). It concerned documents by way of which the armed forces' High Command set out its strategic objectives in concrete terms as well as the requirements that ensued from these. The war game can therefore be interpreted as a specific experiment whose purpose consisted of verifying assumptions that the aforementioned studies of the armed forces then worked with.⁵⁹

In the spring of 1937, the time came for new direct talks between intelligence experts from both allied armies. This time, the Czechoslovak delegation stayed in Paris between 6 and 11 of June.⁶⁰ A significant part of the discussions was devoted to a joint recapitulation of knowledge concerning the German air force.⁶¹ The creation of an intelligence picture of the construction of the Luftwaffe was a genuinely big challenge for both intelligence units. In comparison with actual developments, it can be said that Czechoslovak intelligence was relatively successful in monitoring this process in terms of specifying the peacetime number of units at the flight level. In summary, Czechoslovak military intelligence estimated the strength of the Luftwaffe at up to 198 flights in April 1937, and 192 had in fact been created.⁶² By the end of 1937, their number had risen to 214.⁶³ From June 1937, French analyses predicted that the overall number of Luftwaffe flights could increase to as much as 230.⁶⁴ According to the same prognosis, the German air force was supposed to have up the 2,670 aircraft at its disposal during this time. It was not an exaggerated estimate. The German organisational and armaments programme, which was meant to have been fulfilled in the course of 1937, anticipated that 2,586 combat planes would be allocated to the units (not including fleet air arm).⁶⁵

58 Cf. *International Military Tribunal (IMT)*, Vol. XXXIV. Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg 1949, pp. 485–486.

59 *The National Archives and Records Administration*, Washington (NARA), Captured records microfilmed at Alexandria, Virginia (USA), Microfilm Publication T-78, roll 425, frames 6395380, 6395389–6395392.

60 RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 131–132. Cf. *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 5, Liaison du 2^{ème} bureau tchèque à Paris (juin 1937).

61 *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 5, État-major de l'Armée, 2^{ème} bureau (E-M, 2^{ème} bureau) – Section de renseignement (SR) à Section des armées étrangères (SAE), 28 juin 1937.

62 The presented conclusions are based on a comparison of the following sources: *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2682, d. 5, Schéma organizace německého vojenského letectva, duben 1937 / A Chart Outlining the Organisation of the German Military Air Force, April 1937/ (an original copy of the organisational chart of the second department of the Czechoslovak General Staff), and TESSIN, Georg: *Deutsche Verbände und Truppen 1918–1939*, pp. 290–292. Cf. also VÖLKER, Karl-Heinz: *Die deutsche Luftwaffe 1933–1939. Aufbau, Führung und Rüstung der Luftwaffe sowie die Entwicklung der deutschen Luftkriegstheorie*. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt – Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1967, pp. 102–103.

63 VÖLKER, Karl-Heinz: *Die deutsche Luftwaffe 1933–1939*, p. 103.

64 More details can be found in JACKSON, Peter: *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 213–215.

65 See TESSIN, Georg: *Deutsche Verbände und Truppen 1918–1939*, p. 291.

Karel Straka

For the Paris conference in June, it was characteristic that Czechoslovak military intelligence would convincingly corroborate its latest findings with photocopies of the relevant documents of primary importance. The biggest contribution came from photocopies of files and technical sketches that gave details of fortification work against Czechoslovakia. These came from Engineer Fortifications Staff 16 (Festungspionierstab 16) in Weiden.⁶⁶

Similarly, an autumn conference also involved sharing reports about Germany. It took place in Prague on 7–14 November 1937. The two highest representatives of French military intelligence, Lieutenant-Colonel Rivet and Lieutenant-Colonel Gauché, travelled to Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷ They took home with them the latest output that Czechoslovak military intelligence considered to be the most relevant in terms of informed awareness among the allies. This concerned 11 relatively comprehensive items dealing with the mobilisation of German ground forces, fortification constructions against Czechoslovakia and France, and information gleaned from interrogations of deserters from the German defence forces who had fled to Czechoslovakia, and papers on the economic situation in Germany.⁶⁸

In 1937, three years of systematic intelligence cooperation against Germany had elapsed, so the Prague meeting in November was an opportunity to take stock among other things. The theme of the conference was the Third Reich's level of preparedness for war, which was jointly dealt with, on the one hand, and an evaluation of the cooperation up to that point on the other. All the intelligence efforts of both armies were aimed at the issue of whether Germany was capable of waging war. As early as after the Paris conference in June, Czechoslovak intelligence had predicted that the threat of a sudden conflict had to be taken into account, but that the Third Reich currently had very little prospect of success and that it would therefore not take any actions that could cause it damage. It anticipated, however, that in the spring of 1938, the organisation of the German armed forces would progress even further, that permanent fortifications in the west would be reinforced, and that German prospects of success would thus improve somewhat in the event that it exercised its power and intervened in Central Europe.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, despite this assessment, it did not expect Germany to unleash a war earlier than 1940–1941.⁷⁰

Upon returning to their homeland, Rivet and Gauché made several notable assessments concerning the standard of Czechoslovak military intelligence. Both considered the Czechoslovak information apparatus to be a strategically situated agency,

66 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 5, E-M, 2^{ème} bureau – SR à SAE, 28 juin 1937.

67 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3103, d. 3, C-R du Lt colonel Gauché sur la liaison effectuée à Prague auprès du 2^{ème} bureau tchécoslovaque entre le 9 et le 12 novembre 1937; C-R d'une mission du chef du Service de renseignement à Prague, 7 au 14 novembre 1937. Cf. RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 172–173.

68 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 5, Liste des documents et des renseignements remis à l'État-major français au cours de la liaison de novembre 1937 (not dated in more detail).

69 VÚA – VHA, FMSÚMV, sign. 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2, odděl., dated 16 November 1938.

70 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3103, d. 3, C-R du Lt colonel Gauché sur la liaison effectuée à Prague auprès du 2^{ème} bureau tchécoslovaque entre le 9 et le 12 novembre 1937.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

which had the potential to provide the Paris head office with valuable data. From the French side, however, a certain mentorship approach to the historically younger intelligence organisation was evident, which could be attributed to the French belief that they were training their allies in military terms. This was not palpably obvious in their mutual relations, but it did demonstrably manifest itself on an internal French level. This was where French intelligence operatives derived their right to assess their alliance partner from the point of view of an older, more experienced entity with a historical tradition. It can be said without exaggeration that they had become accustomed to receiving very valuable information from Prague since 1934. In the course of 1937, however, the Czechoslovak informational apparatus had a bit of a crisis in respect to the performance of its secret service. Consequently, the French had been critical of the fact that, since obtaining the reports on the German General Staff war game of December 1936, they had not succeeded in getting any similarly valuable information from their Czechoslovak partners. The only thing they showed any marked appreciation for was the permanent transfer of intelligence materials on German fortification work in Bavaria.⁷¹

Both French officers attributed the cause of the crisis of Czechoslovak intelligence to the fact that its activity on German territory had died down somewhat. At the time when the November conference was being held, it had been dealing with adverse external circumstances and influences for eight months. In the first half of the year, a harsh anti-Czechoslovak press campaign had been launched in the Reich. During this period, the Reich's diplomatic service had also been intervening in Prague.⁷² Both developments were linked to an affair that the Nazis did not refrain from stirring up with respect to Czechoslovakia after the arrest of Bruno Weigel, a diplomatic courier for the German Reich. He was arrested in November 1936 on reasonable suspicion of intelligence activity against Czechoslovakia. This was proven when compromising documents were found on his person. Interventions on the part of the Reich led to Weigl being released from custody in June 1937.⁷³ After these events, external pressure on the Ministry of National Defence actually had such a strong impact that Colonel Hájek, the head of the second department of the General Staff, had to be temporarily assigned to the performance of other activities, at least in terms of outward appearances.⁷⁴

The French information is also important in terms of their findings regarding the opinions of the Czechoslovak command on the military value of another ally,

71 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3103, d. 3, C-R du Lt colonel Gauché sur la liaison effectuée à Prague auprès du 2^{ème} bureau tchécoslovaque entre le 9 et le 12 novembre 1937; C-R d'une mission du chef du Service de renseignement à Prague, 7 au 14 novembre 1937.

72 Ibid., C-R d'une mission du chef du Service de renseignement à Prague, 7 au 14 novembre 1937.

73 KOKOŠKA, Jaroslav – KOKOŠKA, Stanislav: *Spor o agenta A-54. Kapitoly z dějin československé zpravodajské služby* /The Dispute over Agent A-54. Chapters from the History of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service/. Naše vojsko, Prague 1994, pp. 62–63.

74 In the period from 1 October 1937 to 30 April 1938, he officially worked as an officer for special tasks with the third (operational) department of the General Staff. See *Vojenské osobnosti československého odboje 1939–1945* /Military Personalities of the Czechoslovak Resistance 1939–1945/. Ministerstvo obrany ČR – Agentura vojenských informací a služeb, Prague 2005, p. 86.

Karel Straka

namely the Soviet Union. Gauché noted that General Krejčí, the chief of the General Staff and a former advocate of military cooperation with the Soviets, completely changed his opinion on the capabilities of the Red Army in the course of 1937. After hearing reports of the tragic consequences of Stalin's Great Terror in the ranks of the army's commanding officers, Krejčí was convinced that it wasn't capable of providing Czechoslovakia with genuinely effective military assistance and wouldn't be for a long time. He pointed out that, following the executions of Marshal Tukhachevsky and other top-ranking officers of the Soviet command, 10,000 other officers had disappeared, and he expected that the killings were not yet at an end. In his view, all of this had deeply affected the Red Army with respect to its general military value and morale as well as in material terms.⁷⁵

Strategic information within the limits of an asymmetrical alliance (from the Austrian Anschluss to Munich)

The biggest demands placed on both allies' intelligence units stemmed from the need to identify in a timely manner as accurately as possible the next strategic objectives of Nazi Germany. However, reports on Czechoslovakia were somewhat overshadowed by findings that concerned Austria. February 1938 and the onset of the crisis surrounding this country brought about an intensification in Czechoslovak-French intelligence cooperation. Mutual coordination involved monitoring the current military situation on the territory of the Third Reich. A summary of reports, which a French analysis concluded on 15 February 1938, anticipated that a violent German operation against Austria would occur as early as the spring. It based its conclusions on substantial circumstantial evidence that concerned partial, but sufficiently conclusive, measures taken in the German defence forces and in the civil sector.⁷⁶ The Czechoslovak intelligence apparatus was put on a state of alert after the Austrian chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, was called on 12 February to hear the ultimatum demands of the Reich chancellor. On 16 February, the French Military Mission received a request from Paris to report everything the Czechoslovak General Staff had shared with it to date, primarily with regard to the mustering of German troops, paramilitary units, and the so-called Austrian Legion in Bavaria before Schuschnigg's aforementioned visit to Hitler. Any changes in the behaviour of these forces after 12 February were also supposed to be reported. The purpose of this request was to obtain sufficient comparative material to draw conclusions on further developments.⁷⁷ Czechoslovak offensive intelligence conducted a systematic survey of Bavaria, which was also guided among other things by the request from Paris. Only routine winter exercises near the German-Austrian state borders and training activities by Grenzwacht units in Bavaria had been recorded for the time being. This information made its way to the

75 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3103, d. 3, C-R du Lt colonel Gauché sur la liaison effectuée à Prague auprès du 2^{ème} bureau tchécoslovaque entre le 9 et le 12 novembre 1937.

76 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Note pour le SR, 15 février 1938.

77 Ibid., E-M, 2^{ème} bureau – SAE à Faucher, 16 février 1938.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

Paris head office via the mission and the Poste de liaison.⁷⁸ In terms of the defensive interests of both alliance partners, the most important thing was whether their military intelligence bodies could react to sudden changes in the situation and how they would manage to do so. The French intelligence apparatus performed admirably. It picked up the mobilisation of German forces against Austria literally a few hours after it had begun. The relevant orders had been posted and sent to the higher command of the Wehrmacht during the evening of 10 March.⁷⁹ The French consul in Munich was the first to report the incipient mobilisation to Paris at 12.50 a.m. the following day.⁸⁰ Soon afterwards, they also learned about the German mobilisation in Prague, where an urgent telegram arrived on 11 March from the second department of the French General Staff of national defence saying that German troops in Bavaria were on a state of high alert and moving toward the borders with Austria, which had been closed in the meantime. The urgent communication warned that a German intervention in Austria was now possible. The Paris head office asked General Faucher to provide it with reports of all measures taken by the Czechoslovak government and information from Czechoslovak military intelligence on the military situation in Austria after the Wehrmacht's anticipated encroachment onto its territory.⁸¹ On 12 March, the Czechoslovak intelligence apparatus precisely identified via radio intercepts the time when German troops crossed the current German-Austrian state border.⁸² The analytical units of both allied countries subsequently subjected the German Anschluss operation to a thorough analysis. They came to the highly cautionary conclusion that, despite all the deficiencies which were apparent during the advance on Vienna, the Wehrmacht was a highly capable entity. The French analysis convincingly corroborated this statement with the fact that it only took two days and three hours from the announcement of the alert for five to six deployed divisions to set the seal on the operation by entering Vienna.⁸³

The threats facing Czechoslovakia had already begun to make their presence felt even before the Austrian Anschluss. The first serious sign was reported by the intelligence bodies of the French Navy, which passed it on to the Intelligence Service of the General Staff of National Defence on 17 February. The report stated that Germany intended very soon, even as early as 20 February, to launch a military operation against Czechoslovakia. Weight was given to this by the fact that it came from a source that had been labelled as very good. A similar message was reported

78 Ibid., deux telegrammes chiffrés, 17 février 1938; Renseignement de Poste de liaison, 21 février 1938.

79 For a detailed look at this issue, see SCHMIDEL, Erwin A.: *Der „Anschluss“ Österreichs. Der deutsche Einmarsch im März 1938*. Bernard & Graefe, Bonn 1994, p. 136ff.

80 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Note sur l'intervention allemande en Autriche, 17 mars 1938.

81 Ibid., E-M, 2^{me} bureau – SAE à Faucher, 11 mars 1938.

82 KOKOŠKA, Stanislav: Československé vojenské zpravodajství v roce 1938 /Czechoslovak Military Intelligence in 1938/. In: *Sborník Vojenské akademie v Brně /Brno Military Academy Anthology/*, 1999, No. 2, p. 98.

83 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Note sur l'intervention allemande en Autriche, 17 mars 1938. L'occupation de l'Autriche par l'armée allemande, juillet-août 1938. For a Czechoslovak analysis, see VÚA – VHA, f. MNO – Hl. št./2. odděl., Box 283, č. j. 11 090 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl. – Okupace Rakouska Německem /The Occupation of Austria by Germany/, the beginning of April 1938 (not dated in more detail).

Karel Straka

from Czechoslovakia at the same time, which concurred on the date of the German operation. On 17 February, Lieutenant-Colonel Rivet was called to General Gamelin to comment on the value of the given data. On the same day, General Faucher was entrusted to immediately pass the report on to the General Staff in Prague. After interdepartmental consultations between the intelligence units and after a comparison with other communications, the urgent content was disproved as early as 18 February. After this experience, however, the Paris head office decided to focus its resources on the permanent monitoring of the military situation in high-priority areas on the territory of Upper Silesia, Kladsko, southern Saxony, and north-eastern Bavaria. Cooperation with Czechoslovak intelligence was focused in the same directions.⁸⁴

Events surrounding the Austrian Anschluss had still not subsided when the intelligence centres in Paris and Prague obtained new reports which in their entirety confirmed that the next crisis would involve Czechoslovakia. The intelligence picture, which was initially distorted by information that was too fragmentary, partially meaningful, and erroneous,⁸⁵ began to be unprecedentedly precise as of April 1938. The first of several genuinely crucial pieces of information was recorded by the French Intelligence Service on 6 April. It came from a source who evaluated it as strictly confidential and completely credible. According to it, Staff of the VIIth army corps in Munich was currently preparing a mobilisation plan that was directly related to an attack on Czechoslovakia. This communication was acknowledged as being crucially important as evidenced by the fact the Lieutenant-Colonel Rivet took it to Édouard Daladier, the prime minister who was simultaneously the minister of national defence.⁸⁶ A few days later, a reliable source announced on 9 April that high-ranking officers of the Third Reich considered Czechoslovakia to be unsustainable in its current form. This case was supposed to be resolved within a very short time, either by way of an Anschluss with the Germans living in the Czech borderlands or through a military operation under the pretext of ending the oppression of the German minority. Appropriate measures had apparently already been set in motion. The report was sent immediately to the Prague General Staff via the French Military Mission.⁸⁷

Similar reports to this one fostered an atmosphere of growing tension, which was really palpable in Czechoslovakia. Since the Anschluss in Austria, its civilian and military intelligence apparatus had recorded the repeated occurrence of reports that had a certain common basis. It concerned the fact that racial strife in the border areas was

84 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Note pour le S. R., 17 février 1938; E-M à Faucher, 17 février 1938; Ibid., 7 N 3106, Renseignements, 17 février 1938. For more on the circumstances surrounding the evaluation of this report, see RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 194–195.

85 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Renseignement téléphoné par S. R., 23 mars 1938.

86 YOUNG, Robert J.: French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938–1939. In: MAY, Ernest R. (ed.): *Knowing One's Enemies. Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986, pp. 274, 278. Colonel Gauché says in his memoirs that the second department of the Czechoslovak General Staff received an identical report at that time. However, there is a lack of evidence for such a categorical statement in the sources of Czechoslovak origin. Cf. GAUCHÉ, Maurice: *Le Deuxième bureau au travail 1935–1940*. Amiot-Dumont, Paris 1953, p. 70.

87 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Daladier à Faucher, 9 avril 1938.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

steering Germans towards deciding to break away from Czechoslovakia. Any push-back from the Prague government would trigger an intervention by the SA, SS, and the Sudeten German legion, which were supported by German defence forces. After a rapidly conducted operation, foreign countries would be confronted with the fact that the nebulously defined border areas of the Czech lands had been joined to the Third Reich. Reports of this kind even led to at least two intelligence emergencies in Czechoslovakia (on 9 and 28 April).⁸⁸ In this markedly tense situation, Czechoslovak military intelligence received highly alarming reports on 20 May of a massive concentration of around 10 German divisions in southern Saxony and in north-eastern Bavaria. The extraordinary military measures that were subsequently announced (during which the numbers of the Czechoslovak defence force increased to 371,000 men) were the result of a kind of tolerable compromise between the demands of the Czechoslovak military command and the political considerations of the government. Reconnaissance of the military situation in critical areas of Germany did not prove the mustering of troops before an attack on a neighbouring state. The Czechoslovak and French analysts were restrained in their judgements of the causes of the crisis, but the reasons were different. On the Czechoslovak side, it soon transpired that it had been an exaggerated reaction, conditioned by the preceding tensions after the Austrian Anschluss and the feverish atmosphere of municipal elections. The French were rather more rational. They admitted the unexpected decision of the Nazis to suddenly attack a neighbouring state, but from their reactions it was evident that the Czechoslovak allies according to them had erroneously interpreted the transfer of German forces to the training grounds of Königsbrück in south-eastern Saxony and Grafenwöhr in north-eastern Bavaria.⁸⁹

In terms of the wider context of the intelligence relations of both armies, the crisis in May was fundamental because from that time onwards the French General Staff of National Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris consistently urged the Czechoslovak authorities to always inform them in advance of all crucial decisions taken by the Prague government, particularly those that concerned the defence of the state. With this arrangement, the French government intended to forestall any repetition of an unexpected crisis like that which occurred after 20 May. It also wanted to prevent the Czechoslovak government from providing Nazi propaganda in this heated atmosphere with any pretext for aggressive campaigns, which would further complicate already problematic developments. The French Military Mission was a key mediator in this chain of events. The attention of French officials was mainly consumed with the Czechoslovak intention to extend military service from two to

88 For a uniquely preserved set of sources on this, see *VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství I. sboru* (Headquarters of the First Corps), k. 123, folder Události do „O“ (Events up to “O”), the repeatedly declared intelligence emergency is illustrated by telegram No. 220 (9 April 1938), telegram No. 624 (3 May 1938), filed under an identical signature.

89 For more details on the contexts of the crisis with Czechoslovak and French military intelligence in May 1938, see STRAKA, Karel: *Československé a francouzské vojenské zpravodajství v letech 1933–1938*, pp. 50–57. For the most recent summary and reinterpretation of the events of May 1938, see KRÄMER, Andreas: *Hitler's Kriegskurs, Appeasement und die „Mairise“ 1938*. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin 2014.

Karel Straka

three years. President Beneš informed General Faucher of this planned prolongation, which was supposed to be a response to the increased demands of defending the state, as early as 29 April 1938.⁹⁰

From as early as April 1938, the asymmetry between France and Czechoslovakia also manifested itself, among other things, in the relevance of intelligence information and its sources. For a number of reasons, the Paris head office had more objectively favourable opportunities to gain access to key sources than the Czechoslovak information apparatus. In principle, all reports making their way to Paris at that time had a relevant value. They varied in scope or in terms of having more general or conversely more specific content. What they had in common was that they warned of a rapidly approaching crisis.⁹¹ In response to this, French military intelligence activated emergency and pre-mobilisation measures for the first time.⁹² In terms of putting things in concrete terms and especially the extent to which his reports concurred with the developments that the new reports predicted, one agent's communications outshone the others. His information was usually identified by the cryptograms H.E. or Source Z. The person working under this name was Hans-Thilo Schmidt, a top member of the secret agency of the French Intelligence Service. He was a member of the NSDAP and worked at the Reich Defence Ministry in the so-called Chiffrierstelle. In 1934, this body was incorporated into the Research Office (Forschungsamt) of the Reich Air Ministry. His brother Major-General Rudolf Schmidt had commanded the Wehrmacht's 1st armoured division since 1936.⁹³

The first serious report from Source Z concerning the future fate of Czechoslovakia was filed by the French Intelligence Service on 8 April 1938. A highly placed German military officer had told him the content of a discussion he had had on 4 April with the generals Ludwig Beck and Heinz Guderian as well as the chief of staff of Guderian's 16th Army Corps, General Staff Colonel Friedrich Paulus. They considered an attack on Czechoslovakia to be close at hand, but it was supposed to happen in October at the earliest. The report spoke of three alternatives. If the Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein and his supporters reached an agreement with the Prague government, then an attack was less likely. If they entered government, it was assumed that the borderlands inhabited by Germans would break away. If, however, the government continued with its oppression, which was expressively presented in the report, then an offensive operation would be carried out. In an analytical commentary on the report, there was a warning that it was possible to expect a reprise of

90 French priorities in the given matters are corroborated in the following sources: *SHD/DAT*, papiers Gamelin – 1 K 224/15, d. 3, Faucher à Gamelin, 5 mai 1938; Résumé d'un entretien avec le président Benes 12 juillet 1938; Bonnet à Daladier, 12 août 1938.

91 A summary of reports up to the end of August 1938 is supplied, in particular, by the following: *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2523, d. 2, Note sur l'exercice de mobilisation en Allemagne (les renseignements reçus jusqu'au 25 août 1938), 31 août 1938.

92 Important measures from the period between the end of July and the beginning of September 1938 are mentioned by RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 224, 233.

93 For more on his fate, see, in particular: PAILLOLE, Paul: *Notre espion chez Hitler*. Laffont, Paris 1975. Also see NAVARRE, Henri: *Le Service de renseignements 1871–1944*. Plon, Paris 1978, pp. 54–56.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

what had occurred during previous crises, i.e. during the removal of the demilitarised zone in the Rhineland and the Austrian Anschluss. Chancellor Hitler would not take the Third Reich's lack of readiness for war into account and everything would ultimately rest solely on his decision.⁹⁴

Source Z was then quiet for a while on the subject of Czechoslovakia before producing some highly significant reports at the end of the summer. He first outlined what the Nazi leadership was planning in the most precise terms till then on 23 August. He put it in more specific terms and added details on 25 August. It wasn't until 9 September that his statements were verified by further information. Everything was based on the interpreted comments of a high-ranking Wehrmacht officer, though the agent did not specify who it was. This military personage was among guests who had had dinner with Chancellor Hitler on the occasion of his visit to the Groß Born military training grounds (now Borne Sulinowo in the Polish Republic) where he participated in exercises that were taking place there. On the subject of Czechoslovakia, the Fuhrer said that *this ulcer must be removed*, and he categorically declared that it was his intention to attack this state on 25 September 1938.⁹⁵ This date was confirmed to Source Z by an officer of the High Command of the German armed forces.⁹⁶ According to Hitler, the whole operation was meant to result in the victim being divided up between Germany, Hungary, and Poland. The border areas of the Czech lands would go to Germany and an entity would be established from the remaining territories that would be completely dependent on the Reich. With a certain autonomy, Slovakia would be left to fall under Hungary's influence. Poland would take over the border territories where its ethnic minority was located. Hitler did not neglect to add that he was sure Great Britain and France would not take any action and would not support Czechoslovakia. Among the details that Source Z ascertained amid the overall strategic plan was the fact that preparations for its implementation had already begun on 26 August with the cancellation of leave in the armed forces.⁹⁷ From the beginning of September, troops were to be concentrated in areas close to Czechoslovakia's state borders. Further details were then of an operational nature because they concerned the deployment of the 1st armoured division. The agent described the plan to cancel its peacetime staffing, its last exercises with live ammunition at a special shooting range for tank units at Lübeck, and an assembly at the Grafenwöhr military training grounds in Bavaria, where the division was supposed to muster from 11 September.⁹⁸ For this assembly, the agent used the term *Erster Übungsabschnitt* (First Training Squad) on 5 September.⁹⁹ The division was meant to covertly transfer to Furt im Wald on the evening of 24 September. It was supposed to launch an attack from there

94 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 3, Renseignement, Source Z, 8 avril 1938.

95 Ibid., 7 N 2523, d. 2, Source Z, 23, 25 août, 5 septembre 1938. The acquisition of these reports is also significantly reflected upon in: GAUCHÉ, Maurice: *Le Deuxième bureau au travail 1935–1940*, p. 70; and RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, p. 230.

96 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2523, d. 2, Source Z, 25 août 1938.

97 Ibid., Source Z, 23, 25 août 1938.

98 Ibid., Source Z, 25 août 1938.

99 Ibid., Source Z, 5 septembre 1938.

Karel Straka

the following day in the direction of Plzeň. The initial operation was meant to be cloaked by the participation of troops in local sports celebrations, which were due to take place on 24 September. He described the basic structure of the division's attack sequence and added that other formations would be deployed in the battle on 28 September, specifically mentioning the 1st light division.¹⁰⁰ In the aforementioned report on 5 September, he added that the army that would assemble in Bavaria would be led by General Walter von Reichenau.¹⁰¹ A number of other reports from French sources agreed that an attack on Czechoslovakia was meant to occur after 20 September.¹⁰² The French Intelligence Service acquitted itself well, particularly in terms of the information provided by activated double agents living in France. Most of twenty or so of these specific subjects said that the Czechoslovakia question would be resolved at the end of September. This had been made clear to them by their controllers in the Abwehr. One of the agents mentioned, who was rated as an excellent source, stated that the decisive operations would take place from 24 September onwards. The German intelligence community was apparently convinced that nobody would support Czechoslovakia and that everything would proceed as it had in the case of Austria.¹⁰³ A scenario for the immediate future also took shape on the basis of an agency report from another informer, who said with an alleged reference to an Abwehr officer that the crisis would come to a head between the NSDAP rally in Nuremberg (5–12 September) and the end of September.¹⁰⁴ From other agency sources, it was clear that, due to the flames of the crisis being fanned in the Bohemian-Moravian borderlands, the SS would be involved in subversive activities. To this end, they had already been illegally importing weapons and other materiel to Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁵ It was a message from Source Z, however, that was so alarming that Rivet reported it to the top brass of the General Staff of National Defence on 25 August.¹⁰⁶

The cited reports, particularly those sent to the French Intelligence Service by its prominent Source Z, were objectively accurate. This basic statement is based on comparing their content with sources that are highly conclusive. Documentation whose provenance was from the body that fulfilled the role of an operational centre for the High Command of the German armed forces (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – OKW) was used for the comparison. Its main task consisted of ensuring the activity of all units of the German armed forces worked in a coherent and unified manner. This concerned the country's department of defence (Abteilung Landesverteidigung),

100 Ibid., Source Z, 25 août 1938.

101 Ibid., Source Z, 5 septembre 1938.

102 In particular: SHD/DAT, 7 N 2523, d. 2, Situation en Allemagne, 3 septembre 1938; Ibid., Attaché militaire à Berlin, 5 septembre 1938.

103 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2523, d. 2, L'Activité du SR allemand à l'égard du problème tchécoslovaque, 7 septembre 1938.

104 Ibid., d. 2, Renseignement, 29 août 1938.

105 Ibid., Note sur l'exercice de mobilisation en Allemagne (les renseignements reçus jusqu'au 25 août 1938), 31 août 1938.

106 This fact is clearly corroborated in RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, p. 230.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

which comprised part of the operational staff of the armed forces (Amtsgruppe Führungsstab). The last subject mentioned was immediately subordinate to General Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the German armed forces' High Command.¹⁰⁷ The credibility of the content of the examined agency material is mainly borne out by the manner in which the intelligence picture overlapped with the reality of the situation in terms of basic data and related planning activities. At the time when the Paris office received the reports in question, nearly two months had elapsed since 4 July 1938, when the aforementioned department had laid out an activity plan for the German armed forces for the month of September. The prescribed activities were directly connected with preparations for waging a war on two fronts with a focal point in the southeast – the Green deployment, or mustering (Zweifrontenkrieg mit Schwerpunkt Südost – Aufmarsch Grün). Its wording, amended for a new upcoming period of mobilisation, was signed by the Reich Chancellor on 30 May. For comparison with the crux of the reports, it is significant that an emergency march exercise (Marschbereitschaft) was planned to start on 12 September for four motorised divisions, one light division, and, for the 1st and 3rd armoured divisions, in particular. By 28 September, these elite units were meant to have transferred to bases of operations (Bereitstellungs-räumen) near state borders, i.e. in the vicinity of Czechoslovakia. Outwardly, this concentration of forces was concealed as an exercise, during which the coordination of motorised units was tested. For broader context, though this was not mentioned in the assessed reports, it was significant that, at the same time as this, an infantry assault wave with an overall strength of 90,000 men was meant to have gradually assembled at the Czechoslovak state borders from 15 September. This mustering was meant to take place under cover of standard ground exercises. Numerous preliminary measures for an expected mobilisation were meant to be implemented simultaneously. The OKW plan also stated that the mustering against Czechoslovakia could only happen as of 26 September due to the Nazi Party's national rally in Nuremberg, which was to be held on 5–12 September. The rally actually happened on the given dates. It is therefore possible to assume that the date of 26 September really did figure in German preparations, as outlined in plans as early as the beginning of July 1938. The cited OKW plans further show that the time around 25 September was genuinely prominent, because the start of the Green plan coming into effect in the aforementioned wording for the new mobilisation period of 1938–1939 was set for midnight on 27–28 September.¹⁰⁸ In a draft of new wording for the Green plan dated 18 June 1938, the Reich Chancellor said that he was counting on an operation against Czechoslovakia as of 1 October of that year.¹⁰⁹ That, however, did not in fact mean that the operation could not commence sooner. In another outline of the Green plan dated 7 July, the OKW said that, if it was meant to be implemented by the end of the exist-

107 For more details on the structure of the High Command of the German armed forces, see, in particular ABSOLON, Rudolf: *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich. Bd. IV (5. Februar 1938 bis 31. August 1939)*. Harald Boldt Verlag, Boppard am Rhein 1969, pp. 156–170.

108 *IMT*, Vol. XXV. Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg 1947, pp. 451–454.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 445–446.

Karel Straka

ing mobilisation period of 1937–1938, i.e. by 27 September, it would be necessary to prepare a provisional starting plan as soon as possible.¹¹⁰ It is thus necessary to mention in direct connection with the 1st armoured division the assumption that, as one of the most valuable elite units of the Wehrmacht with the greatest striking power, it would undoubtedly be deployed in the main direction of an attack. Its presence on the way to Plzeň, as mentioned in the reports from Source Z, reflects the fact this direction of attack had already been considered necessary for a breakthrough in source materials for the Green plan, which Hitler had discussed with General Keitel, the chief of the OKW on 21 April 1938.¹¹¹

The extraordinary content of the findings of French military intelligence that are under consideration naturally and justifiably begs the question as to whether this key information made its way to the target of the German aggression, i.e. Czechoslovakia. The results of the following analysis, however, justify a basic doubt, bordering on certainty, that this was not the case. There are substantial reasons for making this claim. Above all, it is necessary to note that there was a relatively fundamental change in the quality of military intelligence cooperation in the course of 1938. It's possible to identify the short period immediately after the Austrian Anschluss as the start of a transformation in the existing relationship. After this event, mutual personal relations, in particular, took on a different character. Throughout 1938 no conference was held at the previously usual level involving the heads of the intelligence departments of the General Staffs of both armies. Although turbulent developments demanded that the relevant commanding officers remained steadily at their posts, the previously established personal contact remained desirable, especially at such a critical time. In the entire year of 1938, only one officer of the French Intelligence Service visited Czechoslovakia. He was sent to the Liaison Post in April and May, while a delegation from the second department of the General Staff of the French air force was sent at the beginning of June. Those who took part in these trips were lower-ranking members of French military intelligence. Nobody made a journey in the opposite direction. The French Military Mission, the Poste de liaison in Prague, and the military attaché with the Czech embassy in Paris maintained mutual contact in the standard manner.¹¹²

It should be noted that, until the Austrian Anschluss, an important authorisation clause always appears in the aforementioned French findings regarding the threat of war against Czechoslovakia. The Paris head office entrusted them to the chief of the French Military Mission in Prague so that he would pass on these findings to the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces. As of April 1938, i.e. from the time the first crucial reports were received, primarily from Source Z, this authorisation does not appear in the relevant documentation. In other words, the information in

110 Ibid., p. 450.

111 Ibid., p. 417.

112 Cf. RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, p. 190ff. (see here diary records for 1938) and, in particular, *SHD/DAT*, 7 N 2522, d. 2, Rapport du Lt colonel Kuhn-munch, 13 avril 1938; *Ibid.*, 7 N 2682, d. 6, Liaison à Prague du 17 au 21 mai 1938 and *SHD/Département de l'Armée de l'air* (DAA), 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

question was never sent to Prague at all. This fact is the first fundamental indication that strategically important reports were deliberately concealed from their Czechoslovak allies from that time onwards. In the interests of the French government, the hopes of the Czech government and military leadership that France would provide Czechoslovakia with help were not consolidated. Under these circumstances, important intelligence information appeared to be an unpleasant complicating factor. Those making the decisions in France were undoubtedly aware that the provision of salient reports would undoubtedly trigger and intensify urgent calls in Prague for alliance cooperation. In view of this, the highest French executive was completely deliberately inclined towards passivity and so agency reports with alarming content never officially left the military intelligence centre in Paris.

The most serious proof that this was how things were can be found in summaries of the most important reports concerning Germany, which the second department of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces had at its disposal. It primarily concerns a collective report that the second department of the General Staff formulated after Munich in response to an initiative by the third department of the General Staff to conduct an army-wide survey. This was meant to be the basis for evaluating experiences of army activity during the developments that led to Munich. It is clear from this source that the General Staff lacked specific reports about the enemy's intentions in material terms as well as in terms of times and locations.¹¹³

Another important source material is another retrospective list titled *Přehled nejdůležitějších dokumentů o Německu r. 1936–1938* (A Summary of the Most Important Documents About Germany in the Year 1936–1938). It was also compiled after Munich and its contents also don't reflect any of the reviewed intelligence information.¹¹⁴ There is no suggestion either that this information would have also appeared in summaries of reports from the Czechoslovak military attaché in Paris.¹¹⁵

The last sources mentioned demonstrate that the Czechoslovak military intelligence apparatus did not have the relevant French information to hand at a critical time. This, however, still does not mean that it did not make its way to Czechoslovakia, at least in fragmentary form. The data was supplied to Prague in an incomplete, or rather allusive, manner. It came, however, via a completely different route and to other recipients. In other words, it arrived in a way that was not standard procedure for military alliance contacts in intelligence. On 28 August 1938, the Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, Štefan Osuský, sent the Prague Foreign Ministry a telegram in which he reported the crux of a conversation with the French Minister of the Colonies Georges Mandel. This member of Édouard Daladier's cabinet belonged to President Beneš's circle of friends. This is what apparently motivated him to confidentially

113 Cf. *VÚA – VHA*, FMSÚMV, sign. 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl., dated 16 November 1938.

114 Cf. *Ibid.*, f. MNO – hl. št./2. odděl., Box 24 – dodatky, *Přehledy o původu zpráv o cizích armádách v letech 1936–1938 – příloha č. 1* (tabulka, zpracovala plánovací a studijní skupina A 2. oddělení Hlavního štábu v lednu 1939).

115 Cf. *Ibid.*, f. VKPR, Box 176, č. j. 630 dův. – *Zprávy o Francii r. 1937/1938* (Reports on France from 1937–1938), dated 1 September 1938.

Karel Straka

inform Osuský that the French Ministry of National Defence and War had received secure information on German preparations for an attack on Czechoslovakia, which was meant to take place between 20 and 30 September 1938.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, the fact that this information demonstrably arrived in Prague via this route does not guarantee that it was properly utilised. The interdepartmental as well as interinstitutional sharing of information was not yet so well developed and pervasive that strategic information would end up going to the right places.

The case of the French Military Intelligence information under consideration is symptomatic of how the French-Czechoslovak military and political alliance was on the wane, which was increasingly palpable after the Austrian Anschluss. Czechoslovak politicians and military representatives believed in the existing alliance. Despite this, however, it is possible to identify hidden and concealed doubts as to whether France would meet its commitments at the decisive time. President Beneš's faith had been weakened. In August 1938, he expressed the fear that Czechoslovakia had evidently become a heavy burden for France in front of General Faucher. He spoke like this not long after the ambassadors of both Western powers had notified him that Czechoslovakia could not count on their military assistance if war broke out because of internal ethnic problems.¹¹⁷ General Krejčí, the chief of the Czechoslovak General Staff, had already previously encountered their ally's reticence. Evidently at Beneš's suggestion, he had already contacted General Gamelin on 7 April 1938 with a proposal to jointly examine the crucial question as to when and under what conditions both armies would coordinate mobilisation in the event of Germany posing a threat to Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁸ Basically, Gamelin's responses were evasive the entire time. His answers sidestepped the crux of the matter by referring to the need for prior political consent to the proposed discussions.¹¹⁹ Krejčí was disconcerted. Gamelin could not respond positively to his proposals because he himself had not received the relevant authorisation from his government even though he had passed on Krejčí's request in a timely fashion to Daladier for consideration.¹²⁰ A certain disquiet also trickled down from these high levels to the Czechoslovak intelligence community. General Staff Colonel Moravec, the head of group B (reconnaissance) of the second department of the General Staff and also deputy head of the department, allegedly expressed his doubts in the spring of 1938 as to whether France would honour the alliance treaty with Czechoslovakia. He apparently made these comments in front of Major Gouyou, who led the Prague Poste de liaison.¹²¹

116 See HLUŠIČKOVÁ, Růžena – KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945*, díl I, svazek 1, sešit 3 / *The Anti-Fascist and National Liberation Struggle of the Czech and Slovak People, Part I, Vol. 1, Notebook 3*. Státní ústřední archiv, Prague 1979, document No. 353 – a telegram from Š. Osuský, the Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, dated 28 August 1938, pp. 57–58, and document No. 362 – a confidential report from the same source, dated 31 August 1938, p. 63.

117 SHD/DAT, papiers Gamelin – 1 K 224/15, d. 3, Faucher à Gamelin, 11 août 1938.

118 Ibid., Krejčí à Gamelin, 7 avril 1938. Cf. BENEŠ, Edvard: *Paměti I. Mnichovské dny*, p. 148.

119 SHD/DAT, papiers Gamelin – 1K 224/15, d. 3, Faucher à Gamelin, 5 mai 1938; Gamelin à Krejčí (projet).

120 Ibid., Gamelin à Krejčí, 14 avril 1938.

121 For a unique testimony, see *Archiv bezpečnostních složek* (Security Services Archive), f. Hlavní správa

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

The unfavourable developments in international relations in 1938 disrupted the traditional rhythm, extent, and method of holding intelligence conferences that had been in place up to that point. In terms of expertise, there was an important change in the staffing of delegations on the French side. It was typical that there was a decline in the number of analysts present. This is illustrated by two separate spring missions carried out by Lieutenant-Colonel Henri Kuhn-munch, an Intelligence Service officer. He was a very experienced intelligence officer who worked as head of an intelligence outpost called the Metz Office of Regional Studies (Bureau régional d'études Metz – BRÉM). He first stayed in Czechoslovakia between 10 and 19 April and again from 17 to 21 May. His first mission took place in response to the Austrian Anschluss and in an effort to strengthen the connection with Prague's second department, because the French Military Mission and particularly the Prague Poste de liaison had not shown themselves to be sufficiently effective and flexible bodies for reciprocal informational communication at the time of the Austria crisis. Kuhn-munch's first mission, however, was not focused on reports about Germany, but on Czechoslovak military intelligence itself. In summarising the data that he processed on this subject, Kuhn-munch noted that its leadership was unified and that it did not suffer from a lack of coordination and synchronicity. His findings culminated in the statement that *the Czechoslovak intelligence service makes an excellent impression*.¹²² Based on the knowledge gleaned from this first trip, he proposed several progressive measures that were meant to improve mutual intelligence communication. Practically none of these were implemented by the time Munich happened or even later, even though some measures concerning mobilisation were approved. But an important improvement in intelligence cooperation did occur all the same. The second department of the General Staff in Prague asked the French partners on 23 March 1938, i.e. even before Kuhn-munch's first spring mission, for an opportunity to establish cooperation and to exchange reports between Czechoslovak and French military attachés in some European capitals. On the basis of a decision by General Henri-Fernand Dentz, the deputy chief of the General Staff of national defence, dated 15 April 1938, French military attachés were given the task of accommodating their Czechoslovak colleagues as much as possible in terms of sharing and retrieving reports in Germany and Italy. This arrangement pertained to embassies in Berlin, The Hague, Budapest, London, Rome, Riga, Warsaw, Bucharest, Stockholm, and Belgrade.¹²³ In view of the fragmentary nature of source materials originating from the foreign mission of the Czechoslovak armed forces of that time, it is difficult to specify the extent to which this measure was indeed effective by the time of the Munich Agreement.

vojenské kontrarozvědky (Main Directorate of Military Counterintelligence) (302), sign. 302-74-1, Rozklad o situaci v roce 1938 (An Analysis of the Situation in 1938), prepared by General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Emil Strankmüller, 4 November 1945, p. 4.

122 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2522, d. 2, Rapport du Lt-colonel Kuhn-munch, 13 avril 1938. For more details on this mission, see STRAKA, Karel: *Československé a francouzské vojenské zpravodajství v letech 1933–1938*, pp. 51–52, and RIVET, Louis, général: *Carmets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 207–208.

123 SHD/DAT, 7 N 3115, Collaboration avec les attachés militaires tchécoslovaques, 15 avril 1938.

Karel Straka

The objective of Lieutenant-Colonel Kuhn-munch's May mission to Czechoslovakia was to discuss current intelligence gains concerning Germany. Characteristically, there was talk about the German armed forces' numbers as well as details of the advanced organisation of ground troops and the air force, but there was no discussion at that time of the highly relevant plans of the Third Reich. The first strategically important reports of a prepared attack on Czechoslovakia, which the French already demonstrably had at that time, were not examined.¹²⁴ The numerical strength of the German armed forces was a standard topic of the expert discussions as was their projected growth in the immediate future. Czechoslovak analysts came up with a total of 945,000 men (705,000 ground troops, 200,000 in the air force, and 40,000 in the navy). It was assumed that, after trained annual contingents of recruits returned to civilian life and the arrival of new recruits, the numerical strength of the German armed forces would increase to 1,070,000 men.¹²⁵ Existing historiographical data essentially confirms the assumed ground troop numbers. The figures for the monitored period, i.e. roughly around the middle of 1938, ranged from 600,000 to 750,000 men.¹²⁶ Based on these discussions and using other findings, it was generally concluded in June and July that the mobilisation potential of Nazi Germany would already amount to 96 divisions in 1938, i.e. 46 peacetime divisions, including 5 armoured divisions and 5 motorised divisions, and 50 divisions created during mobilisation (30 reserve divisions and 20 Landwehr divisions).¹²⁷ By making a comparison with objective data, it's possible to ascertain that the peacetime numbers of divisions were underestimated while the estimate for the mobilisation potential considerably exceeded the reality of the situation. In 1938, the German armed forces raised a total of 51 peacetime divisions (38 infantry divisions, 4 motorised divisions, 4 light divisions, and 5 armoured divisions). But if it had been forced to mobilise at that time, it would have been capable of raising only 27 reserve and Landwehr divisions.¹²⁸ The conclusions of the Czechoslovak and French analysts did not differ in terms of the main indicators mentioned.

Lieutenant-Colonel Kuhn-munch received a total of seven extensive information files from the second department of the General Staff. Probably the most significant of these was a top secret planning document called Program výcviku německého pěšího pluku v letním období 1938 (German Infantry Regiment Training Programme in the Summer of 1938). By way of an informed extrapolation based on this document, it was possible to come to a number of conclusions about the training of German ground forces. Another file dealt with the issue of the Grenzwacht in the Bavarian section of the Czechoslovak state borders. A special study also dealt with the

124 Cf. VÚA – VHA, FMSÚMV, sign. 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl., dated 16 November 1938.

125 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 6, Liaison à Prague du 17 au 21 Mai 1938.

126 DEIST, Wilhelm – MESSERSCHMIDT, Manfred – VOLKMANN, Hans-Erich – WETTE, Wolfram: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. Bd. 1, pp. 437–456.

127 VÚA – VHA, FMSÚMV, sign. 20-29-44, č. j. 13 214 Taj. hl. št./2. odděl., dated 16 November 1938.

128 MUELLER-HILLEBRAND, Burkhardt: *Das Heer 1933–1945*. Bd. 1, p. 25, 68; MURRAY, Williamson: *The Change in the European Balance of Power 1938–1939: The Path to Ruin*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 1984, p. 219.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

Landwehr. Specific material contained a standard list of motorised military vehicles belonging to the German ground forces' automobile fleet. A summary of organisational changes dated 30 April 1938 and the deployment of German armed forces from March with corrections as of 10 May in the same year pertained to all ground troops and the entire air force.¹²⁹ Judging by the records that have been preserved, it is notable that the second Kuhnle mission did not take account of Czechoslovakia's extraordinary military measures of 20 May 1938.¹³⁰

Marked differences in the conception and purpose of intelligence contacts were confirmed by a conference that took place in Prague on 29 June – 7 July 1938. Actual expert discussions were held between 30 June and 2 July. In the days that followed, the French delegation split up. Some returned home, others continued by plane to Warsaw via Berlin, or made a visit to a military air force bases and the Aero and Avia aircraft factories, including a demonstration flight onboard the newly introduced B-71 bomber. They also made reconnaissance trips to the borderlands. Finally, they watched part of the tenth Sokol Congress. In comparison with the conferences that have been analysed so far, the main difference consisted of the fact that this meeting saw the most pronounced intersection of generally focused intelligence with the intelligence segment of aviation cooperation between both countries. This time, the French delegation completely lacked any specialists from the second department of the General Staff of National Defence or its Intelligence Service. It was made up exclusively of intelligence officers from the second department of the air force General Staff. They were led by Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Carayon, who had majors Paul Bailly and Moïse Abel Salesse as well as captains Louis Fournier and Charles Loyen at his disposal. Besides the standard sharing and exchange of knowledge on the aviation and in general the military potential of the Third Reich, this delegation's assignment also emphasised getting an understanding of the real political and military situation in Czechoslovakia with respect to current international developments.¹³¹

It is reasonable to assume that the standard exchange of expert opinions was mutually beneficial. The French officers presented their Czechoslovak colleagues with studies that dealt with the general make-up of the German military air force, its organisation, training, weapons and equipment, as well as the structure of its reserves. Parts of the materials also comprised information on German air bases and munitions depots. A special paper was devoted to the German war industry and its infrastructure. An important part of this conference involved the traditional sharing of information on objectives on German territory. On the basis of this knowledge, the existing body of source materials for preoperational preparations for the combat deployment of jointly constructed air formations, as envisaged by the F-T-A Convention of 1935 and its more recent upgrade, was updated and completed. Czechoslovak

129 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 6, Liaison à Prague du 17 au 21 mai 1938. For more detail, see STRAKA, Karel: *Rekonstrukce československé agenturní sítě a jejích výsledků z let 1933–1939*, pp. 211–220.

130 Cf. SHD/DAT, 7 N 2682, d. 6, Liaison à Prague du 17 au 21 mai 1938 and RIVET, Louis, général: *Carnets du chef des services secrets du Front populaire à Vichy*, pp. 213–214.

131 SHD/DAA, 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938.

Karel Straka

intelligence gave its French guests the latest processed source materials concerning objectives on German territory for operational use as well as information on Germany's military air force that had been obtained via a radio intercept. Its contribution was particularly appreciated by French specialists. Other materials handed over concerned aviation infrastructure on formerly Austrian territory and the Hungarian air force. Answers pursuant to intelligence questionnaires that they had sent each other were exchanged on a bilateral basis. After comparing their findings, specialists on both sides concluded that there were no significant differences between them insofar as it concerned information on the Luftwaffe as well as on the current and future capacity of the German aviation industry.¹³²

The intelligence information discussed was immediately applied to an important measure. This became the main output of the talks in terms of aviation cooperation pursuant to the F-T-A convention. It concerned a *Plán podpůrného bombardování* (Supportive Bombing Campaign), which had been processed by the General Staff in Prague who presented it to French representatives during the conference. The creation of this document was motivated by strategic changes in the military situation after the Austrian Anschluss and the need for rapid air support from France. The essence of the plan consisted of raids by the French air force, starting from its own national territory, on strategically important roads as well as other militarily important locations and facilities in Bavaria and the former Austria. This was expected to slow down operations by German forces against Czechoslovakia.¹³³ The General Staff of the French military air force actually adopted the presented document as the basis for its planning activities and developed it during the summer from the standpoint of preoperational preparations for bombing units.¹³⁴

French intelligence officers, however, interpreted current international events and future prospects completely differently to their Czechoslovak colleagues. The French didn't simply compile their observations during official interviews but also did so on an informal basis and through consultations with the staff of the French Military Mission. Above all, they were taken aback by the uncritical and overly simplified notion of the Czech command that a front of adversaries was actually being created in opposition to Germany which would not allow Czechoslovakia to be threatened. This Czechoslovak interpretation was based primarily on the interventions of the British diplomatic service in Berlin from the time immediately after 21 May 1938. Another thing that had an impact here was the Czech command's belief in the progress being made by the arms programmes of both Western powers, in Great Britain generally and in the air force in France in particular. The Czechoslovak General Staff also believed that, in the case of countries such as Poland and Yugoslavia, where an accommodating attitude to Germany had manifested itself, public opinion would force their governments to support Czechoslovakia when push came to shove.

132 Ibid., C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938, Chapitre I.

133 The French name of the document was *Plan de bombardement de collaboration*. SHD/DAA, 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938, Annexe II.

134 Ibid., G 705, Les accords aériens entre la France et la Tchécoslovaquie (undated).

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

As regards the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak command reckoned it would not remain a passive spectator in the event of an attack on the republic. This all led Czechoslovak officials to believe it was certain, not to mention automatic, that Czechoslovakia would be safeguarded by military assistance from its allies. The exaggerated nature of these interpretations was also markedly apparent in how the internal atmosphere in Germany was viewed. A conviction reigned that a war against Czechoslovakia would escalate into a general conflict that would be Germany's undoing. In conjunction with other factors, this would give rise to a wave of resistance against the Nazi regime among opposition forces that had existed covertly until then. The Czechoslovak General Staff was counting on popular uprisings against the regime in Austria and Bavaria. Among other things, this would also culminate in the resistance of German society, which was politically motivated but also inspired by the drop in living standards that had been brought about by the militarisation of society and the national economy, which had been encumbered by the Four Year Plan (1933–1936) and the New Four Year Plan (1937–1940). These interpretations even led their proponents to believe that, if Germany was to face a European coalition in a war, it would lead to an armed intervention directly against Chancellor Hitler and the Nazi leadership in the highest echelons of the German military.¹³⁵

It is clear from the records of French intelligence officers that the interpretation of the political, military, and economic situation in Germany and in the other states was dangerously divorced from reality. The latest research on this issue has shown that the source of this phenomenon cannot be found in agency material coming from Germany, which testifies to the real situation of a certain part of the German opposition. A fundamental shift in the meaning of this information occurred during the interpretation stage at the level of the second department of the General Staff and from there these notions were then disseminated further in the highest structures of the Czechoslovak armed forces. The fact that these interpretations were exaggerated, preconceived, and lacking in any significant nuance of meaning also manifested itself in the feeling of triumph that the Czechoslovak commanders experienced after the success of a rapid border security deployment on 21 May 1938. It was a phenomenon that could be called self-confidence without a rational corrective. However, French observers also admitted the possibility that the misinterpretations were deliberately calculated to influence those on the receiving end in a way that would benefit Czechoslovak interests.¹³⁶

The complexity of interpretations and prognoses during a challenging period of developments leading to the Munich Agreement can be illustrated by three different estimates of how long Czechoslovak defensive resistance would last if the country was attacked by Germany. At the time of the conference in question, the General Staff of the Czechoslovak armed forces estimated that the republic could hold out

135 Ibid., 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938, Chapitre II.

136 Ibid., Chapitre II, Observations. For a more detailed look at the interpretation of the reports on Germany, see STRAKA, Karel: *Rekonstrukce československé agenturní sítě a jejích výsledků z let 1933–1939*, pp. 268–277.

Karel Straka

on its own for one month, during which its allies were meant to prepare for an operation and intervene against Germany.¹³⁷ In August 1938, the French Intelligence Service obtained information, which probably came from certain opposition circles in the German armed forces, that there were concerns among senior officers about the military value of Czechoslovakia. They presumed that its army was already quite modernised, well-armed, and had numerous fortifications at its disposal. They estimated that Czechoslovak resistance would last up to three months.¹³⁸ After the aforementioned conference, the French aviation intelligence operatives voiced a completely different opinion. Hardly anyone was as well informed as them when it came to the military value, readiness, determination and patriotic sentiment of Czechoslovak society. They unconditionally agreed with their Czechoslovak colleagues on a highly positive evaluation of these factors. However, after taking into consideration all other significant circumstances, they came to the conclusion that, in view of the military potential of the Third Reich, meaningful Czechoslovak defensive resistance would probably not last longer than a few days.¹³⁹

The final period of Czechoslovak-French intelligence relations was just as tragic as the developments leading to the final Munich settlement. During this time, the Czechoslovak intelligence apparatus also received important evidence of the advanced preparations of the German armed forces for an attack on Czechoslovakia. They promptly sent this to the intelligence centre in Paris. This is the context in which one can find a completely isolated example of agency material making its mark within the framework of Czechoslovak-French intelligence communications. Its source was Paul Thümmel (Agent A-54). It's been proven that in the middle of August 1938 the French General Staff of National Defence received from Prague a complete set of photocopies of a German armed forces service regulation labelled as H Dv g 124 Bildheft Landesbefestigung der Tschechoslowakei. Allgemeine Angaben. This document contained the tactical principles for combating light Czechoslovak fortifications and a typology of the fortification system with an overview of all available data of a tactical and technical nature. French analytics made a translation of this and worked with it further.¹⁴⁰ They also had documents at their disposal on the illegal transfer of weapons and destructive materiel for painstakingly constructed terrorist and sabotage structures, which according to the findings of Czechoslovak defensive intelligence had been taking place since August under the direction of the German Abwehr.¹⁴¹

137 SHD/DAA, 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938, Chapitre II, Mesures prises par les autorités tchécoslovaques.

138 SHD/DAT, 7 N 2523, d. 2, Attitude de l'Allemagne, 7 septembre 1938.

139 SHD/DAA, 2 B 97, C-R de la liaison effectuée à Prague, 28 juillet 1938, Chapitre II, Mesures prises par les autorités tchécoslovaques.

140 The presence of this agency material in France is corroborated by SHD/DAT, 7 N 3110, d. 3, Notice sur l'attaque des fortifications tchécoslovaques, 1 octobre 1938.

141 Ibid., 7 N 3106, d. Fin de la Tchécoslovaquie, photographic documentation of the effects of the sabotage materiel, which was seized by the security authorities at various locations in the Czech Republic and tested at the beginning of September 1938 with local and foreign media representatives in attendance.

The covert connections of an asymmetrical alliance

The dissolution of the Czechoslovak-French alliance in September effectively negated everything that had been created during the mutual relations of the previous 20 years. This period represented one of the worst stages in the lives and careers of intelligence professionals in both armies. That was how they felt in both Prague and Paris. The turbulent atmosphere at the end of pre-Munich intelligence cooperation was captured especially aptly by two meetings between Colonel Gauché and Colonel Kalina, the Czechoslovak military attaché in Paris. In the early evening on 22 September 1938, Kalina came to the head of the second department of the General Staff of National Defence in order to tell him the official Czechoslovak position, which was: *Czechoslovakia has adopted a decision to defend itself completely alone against any attack.*¹⁴² After France and Great Britain had definitively rejected helping Czechoslovakia, this was clear evidence of a determination to fight without any alliance support, i.e. to fight under conditions that the strategic planning had never bargained for. Kalina, who was immensely emotional at that moment, also let it be known that the army and the Czechoslovak people were determined to fight to the death and everything suggested that the Germans would not stop at ethnic boundaries as envisaged by the British-French propositions, but would attempt to go as far as Prague.¹⁴³ There were even more dramatic and intense scenes at the Paris head office on the eve of the Munich Agreement where Colonel Gauché spent the critical night of 27–28 September 1938. Kalina spent several hours with him monitoring reports on the mustering of German forces around the Czechoslovak state borders. When they later said their goodbyes, he was unable to hold back his tears. He said to Gauché: *Colonel, if France abandons us, my country is doomed.*¹⁴⁴ The gravity of the moment was such that while looking at him the head of the second department of the General Staff of National Defence was unable to say anything in the face of these emotions.¹⁴⁵

142 Cited according to SHD/DAT, 7 N 3106, d. Fin de la Tchécoslovaquie, C-R, 22 septembre 1938.

143 Ibid.

144 Cited according to GAUCHÉ, Maurice: *Le Deuxième bureau au travail 1935–1940*, p. 62.

145 Ibid.