

7. German preparation for aggression

PREPARATION FOR AGGRESSION: 1933-1936

(...)

Renunciation of Armament Provisions of Versailles Treaty. 21 May 1935 was a very important date in the Nazi calendar. It was on that date that the Nazis passed the secret Reich Defense Law (2261-PS). The secrecy of their armament operations had already reached the point beyond which they could no longer maintain successful camouflage. Since their program called for still further expansion, they unilaterally renounced the armament provisions of the Versailles Treaty on the same date, 21 May 1935. Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on that day (2288-PS) was published in "Voelkischer Beobachter" under the heading "The Fuehrer Notifies the World of the Way to Real Peace." Hitler declared:

- “1. The German Reich Government refuses to adhere to the Geneva Resolution of 17 May. The Treaty of Versailles was not broken by Germany unilaterally, but the well-known paragraphs of the dictate of Versailles were violated, and consequently invalidated, by those powers who could not make up their minds to follow the disarmament requested of Germany with their own disarmament as agreed upon by Treaty.
2. Because the other powers did not live up to their obligations under the disarmament program, the Government of the German Reich no longer considers itself bound to those articles, which are nothing but a discrimination against the German nation for an unlimited period of time, since, through them, Germany is being nailed down in a unilateral manner contrary to the spirit of the agreement.”

(...)

At this point, on 14 October 1933, Germany withdrew from the International Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations. The Nazis took this opportunity to break away from the international negotiations and to take an aggressive position on an issue which would not be serious enough to provoke reprisal from other countries. At the same time, Germany attached so much importance to this action that it considered the possibility of the application of sanctions by other countries. In anticipation of the probable nature of such sanctions and the countries which might apply them, plans were made for armed resistance on land, at sea, and in the air.

Military preparations were ordered in a directive from the Reichsminister for Defense (von Blomberg) to the head of the Army High Command (Fritsch), the head of the Navy High Command, Raeder), and the Reichsminister for

Air, (Goering) (C-140). This directive, dated 25 October 1933, 11 days after the withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, provides:

- “1. The enclosed directive gives the basis for preparation of the armed forces in the case of sanctions being applied against Germany.
2. I request the chiefs of the Army and Navy High Command and the Reichsminister for Air to carry out the preparations in accordance with the following points:
 - (a) Strictest secrecy. It is of the utmost importance that no facts become known to the outside world from which preparation for resistance against sanctions can be inferred or- which is incompatible with Germany’s existing obligations in the sphere of foreign policy regarding the demilitarized zone. If necessary, the preparations must take second place to this necessity.”

(...)

Since they had gone as far as they could on rearmament and the secret training of personnel, the next step necessary to the conspirators’ program for aggressive war was a large-scale increase in military strength. This could no longer be done under disguise and camouflage, and would have to be known to the world. Accordingly, on 16 March 1935, there was promulgated a law for universal military service, in violation of Article 173 of the Versailles Treaty. That law appeared in the Reichsgesetzblatt, Title I, Vol. I, 1935, page 369. The text of the law itself provides:

“In this spirit the German Reich Cabinet has today passed the following law:

Law for the Organization of the Armed Forces of 16 March 1935.

The Reich Cabinet has passed the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Service in the Armed Forces is based upon compulsory military duty.

In peace time, the German Army, including the police troops transferred to it, is organized into: 12 Corps and 36 Divisions.

The Reich Minister of War is charged with the duty of submitting immediately to the Reich Ministry detailed laws on compulsory military duty.” (1654-PS)”

The law is signed first by the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler, and then by many other officials, including von Neurath, Frick, Schacht, Goering, Hess, and Frank. (1654- PS)

F. Assurances

As a part of their program to weaken resistance in other states, the Nazis followed a policy of making false assurances, thereby tending to create confusion and a false sense of security. Thus, on 21 May 1936, the same date

on which Germany renounced the armament provisions of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler announced the intent of the German Government to respect the territorial limitations of the Versailles and Locarno Treaties. In his speech in the Reichstag on that date Hitler stated:

“Therefore, the Government of the German Reich shall absolutely respect all other articles pertaining to the cooperation [zusammenleben] of the various nations including territorial agreements; revisions which will be unavoidable as time goes by it will carry out by way of a friendly understanding only.

The Government of the German Reich has the intention not to sign any treaty which it believes not to be able to fulfill. However, it will live up to every treaty signed voluntarily even if it was composed before this government took over. Therefore, it will in particular adhere to all the allegations under the Locarno Pact as long as the other partners of the pact also adhere to it.” (2288-PS).

For convenient reference, the territorial limitations in the Locarno and Versailles Treaties, include the following:

Article 1 of the Rhine Pact of Locarno, 16 October 1925, provides:

“The High Contracting parties, collectively and severally, guarantee, in the manner provided in the following Articles: the maintenance of the territorial status quo, resulting from the frontiers between Germany and Belgium and between Germany and France and the inviolability of the said frontiers, as fixed by, or in pursuance of the Treaty of Peace, signed at Versailles, on 28 June 1919, and also the observance of the stipulation of Articles 42 and 43 of the said Treaty, concerning the demilitarized zone.”

That has reference, of course, to the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland.

Article 42 of the Versailles Treaty, 28 June 1919, provides:

“Germany is forbidden to maintain or construct any fortifications either on the left bank of the Rhine or on the right bank, to the west of the line drawn 50 kilometers to the east of the Rhine.”

Article 43 provides:

“In the are defined above, the maintenance and the assembly of armed forces, either permanently or temporarily and military maneuvers of any kind, as well as the upkeep of all permanent works for mobilization, are in the same way forbidden.”

G. Reoccupation of the Rhineland

The demilitarized zone of the Rhineland was a sore spot with the Nazis ever since its establishment after World War I. Not only was this a blow to their increasing pride, but it was a bar to any effective strong position which Germany might want to take on any vital issues. In the event of any sanctions against Germany, in the form of military action, the French and other powers would get well into Germany east of the Rhine, before any German resistance could even be put up. Therefore, any German plans to threaten or breach international obligations, or for any kind of aggression, required the preliminary reoccupation and refortification of this open Rhineland territory. Plans and preparations for the reoccupation of the Rhineland started very early.

A document apparently signed in the handwriting of von Blomberg, deals with what is called "Operation Schulung", meaning schooling or training (C-139). It is dated 2 May 1935 and refers to prior staff discussions on the subject. It is addressed to the Chief of the Army Command, who at that time was, Fritsch; the Chief of the Navy High Command (Raeder); and the Reich Minister for Air (Goering). The document does not use the name "Rhineland" and does not, in terms, refer to it. It seems clear, however, that it was a plan for the military reoccupation of the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and the Rhine Pact of Locarno., The first part, headed "Secret Document," provides:

"For the operation, suggested in the last staff talks of the Armed Forces, I lay down the Code name Schulung [training]

The supreme direction of the operation 'Schulung' rests with the Reich Minister of Defense as this is a joint undertaking of the three services.

"Preparations for the operation will begin forthwith according to the following directives:

1. General.

1. The operation must, on issue of the code word 'Carry out Schulung,' be executed by a surprise blow at lightning speed Strictest secrecy is necessary in the preparations and only the very smallest number of officers should be informed and employed in the drafting of reports, drawings, etc., and these officers only in person.

2. There is no time for mobilization of the forces taking part. These will be employed in their peace-time strength and with their peace-time equipment.

3. The preparation for the operation will be made without regard to the present inadequate state of our armaments. Every improvement of the state of our armaments will make possible a greater measure of preparedness and thus result in better prospects of success." (C-139)

The rest of the order deals with military details. There are certain points in this order which are inconsistent with any theory that it was merely a training order, or that it might have been defensive in nature. The operation was to be carried out “as a surprise blow at lightning speed”. The air forces were to provide support for the attack. There was to be reinforcement by the East Prussian division. Furthermore, since this order is dated 4 May 1935, which is about 6 weeks after the promulgation of the conscription Law of 16 March 1935, it could hardly have been planned as a defensive measure against any expected sanctions which might have been applied by reason of the passage of the Conscription Law.

The actual reoccupation of the Rhineland did not take place until 7 March 1936 and this early plan (C-139) necessarily underwent revision to suit changed conditions and specific objectives. That the details of this particular plan were not ultimately the ones that were carried out in reoccupying the Rhineland does not detract from the fact that as early as 2 May 1935, the Germans had already planned that operation, not merely as a staff plan but as a definite operation. It was evidently not on their timetable to carry out the operation so soon, if it could be avoided. But they were prepared to do so if necessary.

It is significant to note the date of this order is the same as the date of the signing of the Franco-Russian Pact, which the Nazis later asserted as their excuse for the Rhineland reoccupation.

The military orders on the basis of which the Rhineland reoccupation was actually carried into execution on 7 March 1936, were issued on 2 March 1936 by the War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, von Blomberg. They were addressed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army (Fritsch), the Commander-in-chief of the Navy (Raeder), and the Air Minister and C-in-C of the Air Force (Goering) (C-159). That order, classified “Top Secret”, in the original bears Raeder’s initial in green Pencil, with a red pencil note, “To be submitted to the C-in-C of the Navy”.

The first part of the Order reads:

“Supreme Command of the Navy:

1. The Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor has made the following decision:
By reason of the Franco-Russian alliance, the obligations accepted by Germany in the Locarno Treaty, as far as they apply to Articles 42 and 43 of the Treaty of Versailles, which referred to the demilitarized zone, are to be regarded as obsolete.

2. Sections of the army and air force will therefore be transferred simultaneously in a surprise move to garrisons of the demilitarized zone. In this connection, I issue the following orders: (C-159) (...)"

There follow detailed orders for the military operation.

The order for Naval cooperation was issued on 6 March 1936, in the form of an order on behalf of the Reich Minister for War, von Blomberg, signed by Keitel, and addressed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy (Raeder) (C-194). The order set out detailed instructions for the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet and the admirals commanding the Baltic and North Sea. The short covering letter is as follows:

"To: C-in-C Navy: "The Minister has decided the following after the meeting:

1. The inconspicuous air reconnaissance in the German bay, not over the line Texel-Doggerbank, from midday or Z-Day onward, has been approved. C-in-C air force will instruct the air command VI from midday 7 March to hold in readiness single reconnaissance aircraft to be at the disposal of the C-in-C fleet.
2. The Minister will reserve the decision to set up a U-Boat reconnaissance on line, until the evening of 7 March. The immediate transfer of U-Boats from Kiel to Wilhelmshaven has been approved.
3. The proposed advance measures for the most part exceed Degree of Emergency A and therefore are out of the question a the first counter-measures to be taken against military preparations of neighboring states. It is far more essential to examine the advance measures included in Degree of Emergency A, to see whether one or other of the especially conspicuous measures could not be omitted." (C-194)

The re-occupation and fortification of the Rhineland was carried out on 7 March 1936. For the historical emphasis of this occasion, Hitler made a momentous speech on the same day, in which he declared:

"Men of the German Reichstag! France has replied to the repeated friendly offers and peaceful assurances made by Germany by infringing the Reich pact though a military alliance with the Soviet Union exclusive directed against Germany. In this manner, however, the Locarno Rhine Pact has lost its inner meaning and ceased in practice to exist. Consequently, Germany regards herself, for her part, as no longer bound by this dissolved treaty. The German government are now constrained to face the new situation created by this alliance, a situation which is rendered more acute by the fact that the Franco-Soviet treaty has been supplemented by a Treaty of Alliance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union exactly parallel in form. In accordance with the fundamental right of a nation to secure its frontiers and ensure its possibilities of

defense, the German government have today restored the full and unrestricted sovereignty of Germany in the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland.” (2289-PS)

The German reoccupation of the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland caused extensive international repercussions. As a result of the protests lodged with the League of Nations, the Council of the league made an investigation and announced the following finding, which is published in the League of Nations monthly summary, March, 1936, Volume 16, Page 78. [It is also quoted in the American Journal of International Law, page 487 (1936)]:

“That the German government has committed a breach of Article 43 of the Treaty of Versailles, by causing on 7 March 1936, military forces to enter and establish themselves in the demilitarized zone, referred to in Article 42 and the following articles of that Treaty, and in the Treaty of Locarno. At the same time, on 7 March 1936, the Germans reoccupied the Rhineland in flagrant violation of the Versailles and Locarno Treaties. They again tried to allay the fears of other European powers and lead them into a false sense of security by announcing to the world we have no territorial demands to make in Europe.”

The last phrase occurred in Hitler’s speech on 7 March 1936:

“We have no territorial claims to make in Europe. We know above all that all the tensions resulting either from false territorial settlements or from the disproportion of the numbers of inhabitants to their living space cannot, in Europe, be solved by war.” (2289-PS)

(...)
