Presentation of Arguments / Bibliography

**Research Question:** To what extent did Adolf Hitler's expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland enable and signify a firm maintenance of power in Germany throughout the

late 1930s?

**Argument 1 - Militarism / Demonstration of Superiority:** The primary method in which Hitler maintained his power through expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland was an extreme demonstration of superiority and an ability to conquer and spread Nazi ideology outside Germany’s border, despite any potential diplomatic opposition.

***Evidence:*** “The occupation by stages of the predominantly German territory by German troops will begin on 1st October. The four territories marked on the attached map will be occupied by German troops in the following order: The territory marked No. I on the 1st and 2nd of October; the territory marked No. II on the 2nd and 3rd of October; the territory marked No. III on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of October; the territory marked No. IV on the 6th and 7th of October. The remaining territory of preponderantly German character will be ascertained by the aforesaid international commission forthwith and be occupied by German troops by the 10th of October.” 8

***Analysis:*** This evidence is significant because it reveals that, even after coming to a diplomatic agreement, Hitler was still planning on employing his own military force to ensure a smooth annexation of the Sudetenland territory, as well as demonstrate his own strength. Essentially, a peaceful agreement would turn into a complete military occupation. This evidence serves as a continuation, rather than change, of the way in which Hitler typically acquired new territories - first reaching approval (or simply lack of resistance), followed by a military invasion of the territory. This evidence does not necessarily represent any one historical perspective, as it’s simply the text of the Munich Agreement. Finally, limitations of this evidence revolve around the lack of quantitative explanation as to the plans for Nazi military intervention.

***Evidence:*** “Hitler was carrying out a foreign policy that was nothing like Otto von Bismarck’s familiar *Realpolitik,*but rather it was revolutionary in both its execution and goals. The Führer aimed at nothing less for Germany than world domination. While this in itself was a clear break from traditional European balance-of-power politics, Hitler’s means of achieving this goal were even more radical.” 7

***Analysis:*** This evidence is significant because it introduces an argument that Hitler’s foreign policy goals were truly extraordinary and revolutionary, all pushing for German expansion. This represents a major change from typical foreign policy, as the aggressiveness innate in Hitler’s strategies radically deviated from traditional imperialist views. The radical nature of Hitler’s expansionist policy was especially effective in broadcasting might, enabling a firm maintenance of power. The intentionalist perspective is of great value to a historian, who can analyze the sheer impact of individual foreign policy decisions made by Hitler.

***Counter Argument:*** However, it could be argued that Hitler’s aggressive foreign policy was not unique in his maintenance of power, due in part to the fact that his tactics bared sharp resemblance to those of contemporary statesmen, as well as the fact that his actions were possibly influenced by other conspiring nations.

***Evidence:*** “Apart from perhaps temperament and tactics, Hitler was no different from traditional German statesmen who sought a dominant position for Germany in central and eastern Europe. Like them, Hitler favored neither war nor conquest of territory, but merely the restoration of Germany’s “natural” position in Europe that had been unnaturally diminished by the Treaty of Versailles (1919). Recovery of German dominance did not necessarily require the direct annexation of Austria, the Sudetenland, or all of Czechoslovakia. It would suffice if these and other central and eastern European states and regions would become satellites of the new Germany.” 7

***Analysis:*** This evidence is significant because it introduces an argument often unconsidered - that despite the aggressive, overbearing appearance of Hitler’s expansion into the Sudetenland, it was, in fact, characteristic of European leaders of the time period. The argument is certainly logical, and provides sound methodology in which Hitler maintained his power; rather than being a despotic aggressor, perhaps Hitler was pushing through what was a natural response to the conditions imposed under the Treaty of Versailles. With yet another intentionalist perspective, this evidence is valuable for historians because it offers a rational explanation (if one exists) for Hitler’s use of foreign policy in maintaining power. The limitation of this evidence is that it offers no actual comparison between Hitler’s actions and those of any other leader, suggesting that the claims made may be unfounded.

***Evidence:*** “There is still the suggestion by A.J.P. Taylor that possibly British of Czechoslovak officials, disappointed with their government's policies, created the [May 1938] crisis in order to force a departure from appeasement.” 5

***Analysis:*** This evidence is significant because of the insinuation that as early as May 1938 there were attempts by other nations to provoke a German attack on Czechoslovakia, which would have been a sharp departure from typical diplomacy or appeasement. This piece of evidence would demonstrate a major change in Britain’s approach to dealing with German aggression, as if they were seeking to force Germany into the role of aggressor. This is of value because, if true, it stands to reason that the ultimate invasion of Czechoslovakia did not serve to exert Hitler’s power, but merely sustain it from external influence. However, the limitations of this evidence are quite large, simply because the evidence of these events actually conspiring is minimal, and circumstantial at best.

**Argument 2 - Sudeten Germans:** The annexation of the Sudetenland and consequent conquest of Czechoslovakia was intended to maintain Hitler’s power by spreading his rule to German people outside the nation’s borders, affirming to the world that the Nazi Party prioritized the lives of all Germans extended throughout Europe.

***Evidence***: “In February 1938, Hitler launched a public case against Austria and Czechoslovakia by declaring to the Reichstag that Berlin’s duty was to protect the approximately ten million Germans living in both states.” 5

***Analysis***: This evidence is significant because it proves Hitler intended to maintain and assert power through a sense of justice for the German people. The declaration to the Reichstag essentially brought about support for conquest of the Sudetenland, uniting all Germans, foreign and domestic, under a single goal. The perspective itself is of value because it portrays Hitler’s determination to defend those considered German, with the ultimate goal of asserting his own power.

***Evidence****:* “The Sudeten German regarded the Czech as ‘a half-educated… creature, to some extent saved by German influence, politically intolerable and unreliable, socially never satisfied and always pushing for his nation.’” 2

***Analysis****:* This evidence is significant because it reveals the Sudeten German perspective on existence within Czechoslovakia, in a sense justifying Hitler’s expansion through their united contempt for Czechoslovakia. For a historian, this perspective is critical in an analysis into Hitler’s maintenance of power, as it reveals a furthering of his own goals to continue receiving support from the German people. Hitler’s maintenance of power through expansionist policy is therefore supported by popular opinion of the citizens over which he governed. This evidence is limited, however, as it makes broad generalizations about Sudeten German opinions, and cannot possibly account for true sentiments experienced by each individual of the time period.

***Counter Argument***: However, Hitler’s claims of serving the interests of the German people were greatly exaggerated and exploited, as the Sudeten Germans seemingly lacked legitimate ties to Germany and the Third Reich, and enjoyed prosperous lifestyles under Czechoslovakian rule.

***Evidence****:* “... they prospered and as the years went by they gradually reached a state of relative harmony with the Czechs, continuing always to press for more autonomy and more respect for their linguistic and cultural rights. Until the rise of Hitler, there was no serious political movement which asked for more…Thus, the plight of the German minority in Czechoslovakia was for Hitler merely a pretext…” 6

***Analysis****:* This evidence is significant because it undermines Hitler’s attempts to portray the Sudeten Germans as experiencing hardship and being treated to poor conditions. This demonstrates a major inconsistency with the Nazi justification for aggression into the Sudetenland. This perspective of the situation would be of utmost significance to a historian because it relates a unique situation often forgotten due to Nazi propaganda. This suggests that Hitler intended to maintain power by serving solely as an aggressor, and that any claims of supporting fellow Germans were fabricated.

***Evidence****:* “With the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany in 1933, however, the Sudeten German Party (SPD) began to use Nazi finances, methods, and ideology to unite the majority of German-speakers in the region.” 3

***Analysis****:* This evidence is significant because it comes as definitive proof of the false nature of Nazi interests in the Sudetenland. Despite Nazi claims that Sudeten Germans were repressed and desired to join Germany, it turns out that these myths only came about through Nazi funding in the region. This evidence is valid because it provides motive and cause for a sudden shift in attitudes of Sudeten Germans following Hitler’s rise, however the limitation of its validity lies in the fact that it’s nearly impossible to determine the extent to which Hitler’s ideology was forced onto the Sudetenland and how much it grew without such an influence.

**Argument 3 - Czechoslovakia’s Resources:** Hitler’s expansionist policies in regards to the Sudetenland, and by extension Czechoslovakia, were fueled by the industrial resources characteristic of the region, which enabled Hitler to maintain and spread his influence on a grand scale throughout Europe.

***Evidence:*** “...the advent of Czechoslovakia affected the long-standing economic competition between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia… The Czech ones now went on the offensive, pressing for national values to be implemented in the economic domain, especially though nostrification of those country’s assets held in ‘foreign’ hands…” 1

***Analysis:*** This evidence is rather significant because it serves to reason that in his invasion of Czechoslovakia, Hitler aimed to maintain his power by protecting the economic factors from which Germany benefitted in the Sudetenland. This evidence demonstrates a cause for invasion due to economic necessity, suggesting that concern for a stable, resource-based economy prompted Hitler’s actions. The Marxist perspective presented by this evidence is quite useful for historians, as it provides alternative methods through which Hitler aimed to maintain his power.

***Evidence:*** “The Sudetendeutsche lived mostly in the industrial area known as the Sudetenland... in a region that was vital to both Czechoslovakia’s economy and to her defense.” 2

***Analysis:*** This evidence is significant because it demonstrates the economic importance that the industrialized Sudetenland held for the rest of Czechoslovakia. Along with background knowledge into Hitler’s political aims, it can be inferred that, in his quest to maintain power through economic superiority, the annexation of the Sudetenland was a necessity in order to benefit the Nazi economy and cripple that of the Czechs. This evidence demonstrates a continuation of Hitler’s economic agenda through expansion, seen through his remilitarization of the Rhineland. Yet, this evidence is somewhat limited, as the language itself is not overly specific as to the importance and effects the industrial area had for Czechoslovakia in the first place.

***Counter Argument:*** While an invasion of the Sudetenland offered economic benefits for Hitler’s maintenance of power, the results were rather minimal, and overshadowed by the disruption of the interests of nations Hitler perceived as a threat to his power.

***Evidence:*** “... Czechoslovakia continued to be the most - indeed the only - reliable segment of the security and alliance system built up by the French in the 1920s.” 4

***Analysis:*** This evidence is extremely significant because it once again reveals alternative strategies through which Hitler hoped to maintain power, in this case by weakening the power of a nation invested in Czechoslovakia - France. This evidence was likely one of many causes of Hitler’s expansion into Czechoslovakia, and potentially reveals a willingness on the part of Hitler to achieve power by gambling his nation’s own economic interests in the pursuit of weakening an enemy. This evidence is quite valid, because it reflects Hitler’s constant concern with and hostile attitudes towards France, who he recognized posed one of the greatest threats to his conquest of continental Europe.

***Evidence:*** “By 1938, the country had also managed to enhance its position through closer relations with the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, extensive French-Czech-Soviet military cooperation would have created a serious barrier to Hitler’s plans of aggression.” 4

***Analysis:*** This evidence is rather significant because it introduces yet another international threat to Hitler’s assertion of power throughout Europe in the form of the Soviet Union. Ideologically, Hitler was vastly opposed to the communist nature of the nation, and would logically feel threatened by their influence reaching near Germany’s own borders. Rather than a change, this evidence demonstrates a continuation of Hitler’s opposition to the Soviet Union, suggesting that motivation for military action in Czechoslovakia was brought about to disrupt Soviet diplomacy in the region. Once again, Hitler may have been inspired moreso by perceived international threats rather than economic benefits to act in the region. However, this evidence has limitations, as it fails to precisely reveal the extent to which a relationship existed between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

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