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How Hitler Became Hitler and Why It's Important Today

IGOR SHUMEYKO

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In October 2016, the American magazine *The National Interest* took a look at the historical experience of the 20th century, publishing an article by David Axe entitled *The Shocking Way Hitler Became Hitler*.

Many authors are referring to the current state of international relations as «Cold War 2.0», noting that the ideological conflict between the West and the USSR during the last Cold War was based on different interpretations of events in the 20th century, among which there is no subject more important than the Second World War. And within this, the question of «who's to blame» is the most important. Who is responsible for the failure of the Treaty of Versailles, for Hitler coming to power, and for the outbreak of World War Two? This seems to be what the author of the article in *The National Interest* is writing about. Yet his focus on the Führer's personality and his sidelining of the influence of powerful political forces that ensured Hitler's rise to power become a smokescreen that hides the problem. Hence the outright lies regarding the 1939 German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact) and the 2009 PACE resolution, which placed an equals sign between the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany as «two totalitarian regimes».

So when exactly did Hitler become Hitler?

A revealing detail noted by Historian Jacques Bergier is that by the summer of 1938, the residents of Berlin had stopped shouting «Heil!» and had gone back to the old form of greeting. In the summer of 1938, Hitler's power was considered complete, yet the commander of the 3rd Military District in Berlin, Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, who was executed by Hitler in 1944, openly rehearsed taking the Reich Chancellery. Many German generals believed that Germany was facing inevitable defeat in its attempt to seize Czechoslovakia in 1938. Giving evidence at the Nuremberg Trials, German field marshal Keitel, chief of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces), said: «We were extraordinarily happy that it had not come to a military operation, because [...] we had always been of the opinion that our means of attack against the frontier fortifications of Czechoslovakia were insufficient. From a purely military point of view we lacked the means for an attack which involved the piercing of the frontier fortifications».

Moreover, Western 'appeasers' presented Hitler with Czechoslovakia's first-rate armaments industry in Munich. Germany got its hands on the Škoda works, the second most important arsenal in Europe. And as well as the famous Škoda works, Germany also got its hands on the comparable engineering giant *ČKD*, the aircraft company Aero Vodochody, which produced Focke-Wulf Fw 189 aircraft for the entirety of the war, and many others. At that time, Czechoslovakian tanks and guns were sold all over the world, making Prague one of the world's leading arms exporters.

Prior to the Munich Agreement, the armed forces of the two countries looked like this: the Czechoslovak Army had 1,582 aircraft, 469 tanks and two million people, while the German Army had 2,500 aircraft, 720 tanks and 2.2 million people. The size of the two armies was comparable. Moreover, the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany was the mountainous Sudetenland. Ever since Czechoslovakia was formed in 1919, it had been building fortifications in Sudetenland. The combination of modern fortifications and the mountainous terrain made Czechoslovakia impregnable in the face of German aggression. And all of this was handed over without a fight.

As well as the uniquely fortified Sudetenland there was also the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement, but the promise of military assistance it contained was blocked by Poland. And Moscow's experience was that there was already a real war in progress between the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany in 1938, only it was going on far away, in Spain, and the issue of who would win was still undecided.

In Munich, the English provided assurances to the Czechoslovak representatives. Chamberlain told the Czechs: «The rights of national minorities are sacred! Hand over Sudetenland and you will receive new guarantees on new borders».

All talk of Western guarantees was just that, whereas the mountainous, heavily fortified region of Sudetenland guaranteed Czechoslovakia's security one hundred percent. On 30 September 1938, however, the Czechoslovak Army began its withdrawal from Sudetenland, leaving behind the mountain fortresses and the major industrial facilities. But Hitler soon presented Czechoslovakia with a new set of demands and on 15 March 1939, Germany occupied the whole country.

Hitler was saved by the Munich Agreement. The deal with the Western democracies gave Hitler enough power to see him through to April 1945. The question asked by *The National Interest*, «When did Hitler become Hitler?», has a simple answer: «In Munich in 1938». The Munich Agreement was an amicable deal between democracies and Nazi Germany, and this is something that cannot be erased from history. It was a deal between an aggressor and his 'appeasers'. The reason we should all remember this today is clear: The West is once again trying to posture as the 'appeaser' in order to prevent the defeat of the terrorist forces that have engulfed Syria and are already threatening Europe.