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Entry of Slovakia into the war against Poland

The position of Slovakia was rather uncertain after its establishment. Germany even offered the country to Poland as territorial compensation for the exterritorial corridor to Eastern Prussia. At the end of March 1939, German-Polish negotiations on potential territorial changes failed. Poland began to orientate itself more towards the United Kingdom and France. Hitler commenced preparations for war, which included Slovakia – Germany planned to use the country to launch attacks against Poland. An agreement was reached at German-Slovak negotiations held on 1 and 2 August 1939, according to which Slovak roads, river navigation and railway lines in the event of war would come under the authority of German army supreme command, which would act in an understanding with Slovak authorities. In relation to the prepared German campaign, issues related to military material and the Slovak army headcount needed to be solved – it was agreed that the Slovak army would number 150,000. The signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union on 23 August 1939 also decided Poland's fate. The Slovak army's use in the prepared military campaign against Poland remained an option. According to Hitler's instructions, the Slovak army was to cover the northern borders of Slovakia against any possible Polish offensive, but should not be engaged outside Slovakia. Slovak army mobilisation started on 26 August 1939. On 27 August 1939, the German ambassador to Bratislava, Hans Bernard, and the German military commission chief in Slovakia, General Franz Barckhausen, sent Slovak Prime Minister J. Tiso a note stating that the German government had obtained information that the Polish army was endangering northern Slovak boundaries and that the integrity of Slovak territory could be violated at any moment. The note further expressed the decision to deploy German troops in Slovakia to protect Slovak integrity and independence in the spirit of the German-Slovak protection agreement. German troops started to move into Slovakia on the night of 28 August 1939. Prime Minister J. Tiso, as the supreme commander of the Slovak military forces, subordinated the Slovak army to German military command according to the previous agreement. It remains unclear when the headquarters of General Wilhelm List's 14th Army, to which the Slovak army was subordinated, decided to use the Slovak army for military activities outside Slovakia. It was probably a last minute decision. The Slovak army was engaged outside Slovakia in the framework of the German military campaign against Poland on 1 September 1939 based on a German initiative and under German command. This breached the original German-Slovak agreement on only using the Slovak army to defend Slovakia against a potential Polish offensive.

The Slovak army did not meet any significant resistance during its movement into Poland. Some Poles even thought that help for Poland was arriving. The specific character of Slovak participation in the German-Soviet campaign against Poland was based on the fact that the Slovak army entered villages with Slovak inhabitants who welcomed the Slovak troops. Ruthenian inhabitants behaved in a similar way when they requested incorporation into the Slovak Republic. Total Slovak army casualties in the conflict against Poland numbered eighteen dead, forty-six injured and eleven missing. Germany recompensed Slovakia for participation in the war by returning the areas occupied by Poland in 1920, 1934 and 1938, with the ensuing contract being signed in Berlin on 21 November 1939. Slovakia gained 770 km² of territory, thirty-two villages and settlements with over 34,509 inhabitants. Territorial gains were considered a great success of the government, since Slovakia had faced territorial losses since 1920. But it was weak compensation for the territories lost to Hungary. It is a historical fact that the Slovak army participated in a war of aggression against Poland. But it is necessary to add that Slovakia was dragged into the conflict by Germany and Slovakia did not seek war against Poland. In fact this war destroyed a traditional pillar of Slovak policy, especially its people policy.



Germany also dragged Slovakia into the war against the Soviet Union and the western allies. On 21 June, German ambassador Ludin notified President Jozef Tiso and Prime Minister Tuka about the German interest in Slovakia joining the war against the Soviet Union. The next morning Ludin visited Tuka and officially notified him of Germany's war against the Soviet Union. He asked for Slovak involvement in this operation. Tuka agreed with Slovak participation in this war. Tiso refused to submit a declaration of war to parliament, because he feared its ambiguous standpoint. He finally agreed with the Slovak army joining the German campaign. Čatloš, the minister of national defence, ordered a partial army mobilisation on 22 June 1941 and issued a command for a mobile group to form. The mobile group passed through Dukla mountain pass at midday on 24 June 1941 and crossed the border to join German troops. At approximately the same time, the government was in session to approve the Slovak Republic's entry into the war and a state defence emergency with retrospective force from 22 June. The Slovak army had two divisions on the eastern front: mobile and security.

The Japanese attack on the American naval base in Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1942 led to the direct involvement of the USA in the Second World War. The USA declared war on Germany and Italy. Even Slovakia entered the war with the great western powers – the USA and the United Kingdom. This happened due to the initiative of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tuka, who on 12 December 1941 – in cooperation with the administration – prepared the declaration of Slovakia's war against the western allies, and had it published in the daily press. On the next day, 13 December 1941, Bulgaria declared war on the USA and the United Kingdom, and Romania, which was at war with the United Kingdom, declared war on the USA. On the same day, Hungary declared war on the USA. Slovakia's entry into the war against the great western powers was an unconstitutional act. The USA had not recognised the Slovak Republic, hence they did not recognise the declaration of war. Prime Minister Tuka took the decision to declare war unilaterally, without President Tiso or parliament. This act was additionally harmonised with the constitution in such a way that the antedated declaration of the

president was attached to the ‘governmental declaration.’

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References: