DIAGNOSING NAZISM:
U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM, 1920-1933

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by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.........................................................................................iv

Chapter

1. Introduction: U.S. Officials Underestimate Hitler and the Nazis.......1

2. Routine Monitoring: U.S. Officials Discover the Nazis...............10

3. Early Dismissal: U.S. Officials Reject the Possibility of a Recovery for the Nazis.........................................................57

4. Diluted Coverage: U.S. Officials Neglect the Nazis...............106

5. Lingering Confusion: U.S. Officials Struggle to Reassess the Nazis...............................................................................151


7. Taken by Surprise: U.S. Officials Unprepared for the Success of the Nazis.................................................................256

8. Conclusion: Evaluating U.S. Reporting on the Nazis...............309

BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................................................................................318
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Chapter 1

Introduction: U.S. Officials Underestimate Hitler and the Nazis

More than a decade before Adolf Hitler became the last chancellor of the Weimar Republic in 1933 U.S. officials had begun their evaluation of his National Socialist movement. American perceptions of Hitler and National Socialism began developing during the infancy of the Nazi Party in the economic and political turmoil of postwar Germany. World War I had not only destroyed the German Empire and its military but had also left a delicate political and economic situation in its wake. As the nation struggled to reenter world affairs, widespread German dissatisfaction with the postwar settlement created an unstable, and at times turbulent, environment. In this chaotic atmosphere of the 1920s, official U.S. perceptions of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party began to form.

While American officials had identified the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) and Adolf Hitler no later than 1922, they soon disregarded the potential of the party and its leader after a failed coup d’état in November 1923. From their first contact with the party, U.S. observers accurately reported the basic tenets of the National Socialist program: extreme nationalism; anti-Semitism; opposition to the Treaty of
Versailles; and the desire to establish a dictatorship. They were also acutely aware of the actions of its paramilitary organizations, particularly the SA (*Sturmabteilung*). Yet, throughout the 1920s U.S. policymakers never believed that the party and its leader had the ability to become more than a mere nuisance to Germany’s legitimate political parties. When the Nazis began experiencing electoral success in the 1930s and eventually propelled themselves into becoming the largest party in the Reichstag, American observers begrudgingly acknowledged the need to reevaluate their stance. Even then, however, they proved unable to accurately assess the Nazi Party’s strength.

An understanding of how agents of the U.S. government viewed Hitler and the Nazis during the interwar period helps illuminate the inability of the United States to accurately evaluate the popularity and determination of the party and its leader. In the United States, the conservative Republican administrations of the 1920s and early 1930s pursued a foreign policy of independent internationalism that emphasized economic interests.¹ They also directly linked commercial success to the political situation in Germany, convinced that a stable democratic government there would serve U.S. commercial needs. Many policymakers failed to identify the National Socialists as a threat to the young democratic regime in Germany. As the National Socialist movement grew in power, U.S. officials struggled to assess its goals and overall strength. Any

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evaluation of how the Nazis would then affect Germany and German-American relations suffered as a consequence.

This dissertation is a three-pronged study of the development of U.S. views of National Socialism from the origins of the NSDAP to Adolf Hitler’s ascent to the chancellorship in 1933. Part one examines U.S. policymakers’ assumptions about the Nazi Party from its infancy through its failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. Developing in the reactionary hotbed of Bavaria, the NSDAP was just one of dozens of extremist right-wing organizations that formed in the wake of German dissatisfaction with the postwar settlement. Initially, American observers paid close attention to the growing party, marking it as a potentially strong movement with a leader in Adolf Hitler who could conceivably develop into Germany’s Benito Mussolini. The failed coup d’état in late 1923, however, completely altered American perceptions. With Hitler in prison and the party temporarily banned, U.S. observers believed that the Nazis had proven themselves to be both incompetent and unable to truly become a factor in German politics.

The second prong of the study examines U.S. policymakers’ failure to recognize that Hitler and the NSDAP were successfully reorganizing and restructuring their approach in order to reenter the political discussion in Bavaria and to expand their presence beyond the state, despite their predictions to the contrary. When American observers did report on the party they once again expounded on its basic tenets as if the dispatches of the early 1920s covering much the same ground no longer existed. For the most part, they described the Nazi Party and its members as nuisances to legitimate
political parties struggling to operate in the complex and chaotic German political situation. It would take Nazi electoral success in 1930 to change the American approach.

Part three explores how American observers responded to a revitalized party led by a legitimate presidential candidate in the 1930s. As the German government floundered, the NSDAP continued to make gains at the polls, eventually becoming the largest party in the Reichstag. Concurrently, Adolf Hitler increased his national profile by finishing second in the 1932 presidential election. He then began working behind the scenes to maneuver himself and the party into a dominant role in the government. Throughout this period, U.S. officials reluctantly acknowledged that the party had not only grown in size and strength but had also positioned itself to play a role in the German government. Yet, the same officials struggled to understand the appeal of the party and badly underestimated Adolf Hitler.


Yet none of these authors provides an analysis of the early American perceptions of the party.

Works on the lives of U.S. officials help to begin the process of uncovering early American perceptions of National Socialism. Two memoirs provide an introduction to the initial development of the American view of the NSDAP. Robert Murphy, the State Department’s vice consul stationed in Munich from 1921-1925, provides a brief chapter on this period in his memoir, *Diplomat Among Warriors,* which imparts a basic understanding of American priorities at the time and the interaction, or lack thereof, between the State Department and its consular officials. Murphy concedes that during his time in Bavaria the real concerns of the United States centered on Germany’s economic situation. While he briefly details his interactions with and opinions of Hitler and the NSDAP, he asserts that rarely did any of his superiors request additional information about the political situation in Bavaria. His contemporary, Truman Smith,

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3 Murphy remained with the State Department and would return to Germany following World War II. Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964).

4 Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors,* 24-26.

provides much more material in *Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith*, edited by Robert Hessen.\(^6\) Included in the work are the reports and notes Smith wrote while serving as the War Department’s assistant military observer in Berlin from 1920 to mid-1922 and assistant military attaché in Berlin from mid-1922 to 1924. In 1922, military intelligence loaned Smith to the American Embassy in Germany. It was through this assignment that Smith gained insight into the early development of Hitler and the Nazis. Unlike other observers, he was “deeply impressed” with the Nazi leader.\(^7\)

Biographies represent the second category of applicable published material. In *Alanson B. Houghton: Ambassador of the New Era,* Jeffrey J. Matthews provides a much needed understanding of American foreign policy in the 1920s via the life of Houghton, who served as the American ambassador to Germany from 1922 to 1925 and to the United Kingdom from 1925 to 1929.\(^8\) Matthews presents a clear view of American perceptions of the turmoil in Germany during the early 1920s but only touches on Houghton’s understanding of Hitler and the National Socialists.\(^9\) Maynard Moser examines the mid-1920s in *Jacob Gould Schurman: Scholar, Political Activist and Ambassador of Good Will, 1892-1942.*\(^10\) Moser illustrates how Schurman, a long-time

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\(^7\) Hessen, ed., *Berlin Alert,* 18.


Republican Party operative, attempted to reestablish favorable relations between the United States and Germany. Minor coverage of the 1930s can be found in Jesse H. Stiller’s *George S. Messersmith: Diplomat of Democracy*. Messersmith served as the consul general in Berlin from 1930 to 1934. The focus of the coverage of his time in Berlin, however, is the period after Hitler became chancellor in 1933. The one monograph to grapple fully with some aspects of American perceptions of National Socialism is Bernard V. Burke’s *Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 1930-1933: The United States and Hitler’s Rise to Power*. Burke provides a solid account of not just Sackett’s perceptions of Hitler and the Nazis but also the insights of embassy staff during the vital period after the Nazis had begun to experience electoral success. Burke fails to place the material in a proper perspective, though, as the interactions between U.S. observers with the party prior to Sackett’s arrival are completely ignored.

This study begins to fill the gap in the history of American perceptions of National Socialism by placing U.S. diplomatic reporting in its broadest historical context. During the interwar period, the United States and Germany began the process of

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12 Messersmith continued to cover the developments in Nazi Germany after leaving his post as he had been named Minister for Austria. He would serve in that position from 1934 -1937. Stiller, *George S. Messersmith*, 25, 55.

13 Stiller, *George S. Messersmith*, 34-55.

rebuilding their relationship under altered circumstances. Not only had the war thrust the United States into a much larger international presence, it also diminished Germany’s standing. While the United States did not view U.S.-German relations as a priority from 1920 to 1933, it spent the period attempting to exert indirect influence, particularly economic pressure, on Germany as it reentered world affairs. Understanding American perceptions of National Socialism will illuminate U.S.-German relations in the post-World War I era.

This dissertation also supplements the literature on U.S. policy history by contributing to a fuller understanding of the State Department’s relationship with its diplomats and Foreign Service officers. During the Nazi Party’s early years, the State Department’s overseas agents had more direct contact with Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP than any other members of the U.S. government. Examining how material from the consular offices and American embassy was shared and understood by the State Department provides a new understanding of the relationship at a time when the agency attempted to alter the course of U.S. foreign policy.

Finally, with its emphasis on the American understanding of National Socialism, this dissertation adds to the growing and important work done on U.S. perceptions of the enemy. Recent scholarship has begun to examine American views of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists after 1933, but little work has been done on the period from 1920

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to 1933. While the United States did not view the NSDAP as an enemy during this period, the American understanding of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists began at this time and helped shape the later views of the U.S. government.

Too often the historical coverage of American perceptions of National Socialism begins with Hitler’s appointment as chancellor in 1933. Yet U.S. observers had the opportunity to document and comprehend the developing National Socialist movement more than a decade earlier. As this study will make clear, however, their coverage proved to be marked by misconceptions, some confusion, and, at times, complete disregard for the success of Hitler and his party.

While concerned about the political and economic stability of Germany, American policymakers failed to assess accurately the growing threat of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists in the 1920s and 1930s. U.S. fear of revolutionary movements on the left or those on the right calling for a return to the monarchy directly colored American perceptions of the potency of National Socialism. The lack of agreement among U.S. diplomats and their differences in opinion when it came to dealing with National Socialism have been left relatively unexamined. Until this omission has been rectified, a true understanding of the interwar relationship between the United States and Germany and the American understanding of National Socialism is impossible. It is the goal of this dissertation to provide that understanding.
Chapter 2

Routine Monitoring: U.S. Officials Discover the Nazis

I

U.S. governmental perceptions of National Socialism developed during the infancy of the Nazi Party and were directly linked to American concerns regarding the economic and political stability of Germany following World War I. The effects of the war altered the future prospects of both the United States and Germany. In many ways, the countries were moving in opposite directions. World War I had not only destroyed the German Empire and its military but had also left a delicate political and economic situation in its wake. The Weimar Republic, the new democratic government, faced a financial crisis as Germany had become “the world’s major debtor” and would be held responsible for a high level of war reparations. At the same time, U.S. participation in the war had shown the country’s superior military and industrial production abilities and allowed the United States to become “the world’s largest creditor.”¹ In short, the United

¹ Manfred Jonas argues that World War I changed the relationship between the United States and Germany from being one of equals to a relationship in which the United States had the upper hand. Manfred Jonas, The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 151.
States gained prominence as the war “changed and clarified” the power relationship between the two countries.  

During the postwar period the United States looked to shape its new relationship with Germany. American foreign policy in the 1920s emphasized the need to maintain and expand “the now dominant position of the United States in world trade and the international money market.” In particular, U.S. officials hoped to create “financial arrangements to enable the flow of funds to fields of investment, diplomatic readjustments of commercial policy, and corresponding domestic decisions in regard to tariff and currency attunements.” Policymakers found that the United States “needed Germany” in order “to stabilize Europe for the sake of their economic and political interests.” While encouraging European stability and economic reconstruction, American policymakers did so “within the limits of national interest as they perceived

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3 Jonas, The United States and Germany, 153. For a good brief discussion of the overall foreign policy approach in the 1920s, see Jeffrey J. Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton: Ambassador of the New Era (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2004), 1-4.


The United States viewed the establishment of a democratic state in Germany as a positive development that would allow for improved economic relations between the two countries. Yet, the fragile Weimar Republic struggled to reenter the world economy while dealing with a population that in large part felt unjustly punished for the war and increasingly opposed to its own government. American policymakers monitored the political climate in Germany in order to ensure that stability and order were being achieved. In particular, they kept a watchful eye on the development of any political organizations that could potentially cause problems within the democratic system. Through this monitoring, American officials in Germany first became aware of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. Rather quickly, policymakers determined the party to be a budding nationalistic organization, yet at the same time they discounted its ability to challenge American interests in Germany, especially after its failed 1923 putsch.

II

U.S. officials believed that the establishment of a democratic government in Germany after the war would begin the process of reintroducing the country into international affairs. Yet events there seemed to suggest that American hopes might not be fulfilled. As Germany struggled to come to terms with defeat, its monarch, Wilhelm II, abdicated his throne on 9 November 1918. Two days later, a provisional government

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signed the World War I armistice. But while the provisional government labored to schedule elections, disgruntled Germans looked for political and governmental alternatives. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had influenced some of these Germans, who worked to create a radically different government than the one the United States envisioned. By the end of the year, “councils formed by workers, soldiers and left-wing intellectuals competed with Reichstag political parties for power and influence.”

In fact, the revolutionaries witnessed some success even before the signing of the armistice. Kurt Eisner led an initially triumphant socialist revolution against the government of Bavaria in November 1918 and headed the Bavarian Republic into February 1919. Revolutionary activity in Berlin increased in late 1918 as well. In November 1918, the Spartacus League formed with the goals of “support for mass activism, active propagation of revolution, a determination to derail a socialist politics of reform and, instead, to build through revolution, a socialist society in the here and now.” In late December 1918, leaders of the Spartacus League founded the Communist Party of Germany, many members of which then supported an uprising of

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radical workers in Berlin in January 1919. But even as revolutionary forces worked to create a new Germany, conservatives organized to face the threat. Armed conservative forces in Berlin quickly put down the Spartacist Uprising and killed the leaders of the Communist Party of Germany who had supported the revolt.

The democratic era in Germany began in this turbulent climate. Soon after the Spartacist Uprising, Germans elected representatives to the Constitutional Assembly. The Social Democrats won over 37 percent of the vote and became the largest party in the assembly. Determined to establish a parliamentary democracy, they formed what came to be called the Weimar Coalition by combining with the Catholic Center Party and the German Democratic Party. The coalition won over 72 percent of the vote in January 1919. The initial formation of the Weimar Republic seemed promising. The new government quickly pursued the approval of a constitution and worked to reclaim Germany’s position in the world. Although the coalition proved to be numerically strong enough to ensure the approval of the Weimar Constitution, it did face potential conflict on both sides of the political spectrum. Despite its recent loss of leaders, the German Communist Party still hoped for the formation of a German Soviet. The parties

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14 Weitz, Creating German Communism, 1890-1990, 95.

to the right of the coalition, the German People’s Party and the German National People’s Party, desired the return of the monarchy.

Even before the armistice, the imperial German government had looked to the United States, and Woodrow Wilson, to facilitate the peace. In October 1918, it directly appealed to the American president to organize a peace conference on the basis of his Fourteen Points.\(^\text{16}\) By the time the Paris Peace Conference opened on 18 January 1919, the Weimar Republic was just taking shape, and it hoped that Wilson would broker a just peace. Despite his presence at the peace talks, Wilson could not overcome the European commitment to harshly punish Germany for the destruction caused by the war. Limiting German involvement in the conference to written communications despite objections and requests for oral discussions, the victorious powers did not view the Weimar Republic as an equal in drafting the peace treaty.\(^\text{17}\) In fact, the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference signed the Treaty of Versailles even before ratification of the Weimar Republic’s constitution.\(^\text{18}\) Thus, just as Germany took steps to establish a democratic government, a harsh peace treaty was being imposed. And the Treaty of Versailles struck many Germans as unjust.

The treaty had three main consequences for Germany and the new democratic government: reducing its territory and population; limiting its military strength; and


\(^{18}\) The Treaty of Versailles was signed 28 June 1919. The Constitution of the German Reich was approved 11 August 1919. See Stackelberg and Winkle, eds., *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 53-63.
severely punishing Germany economically. Particularly problematic for the Germans was the mandate that they accept moral and financial responsibility for the war and its consequences. Article 231 of the treaty, the war guilt clause, stated that the Germans must “accept responsibility . . . for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.” The Weimar Coalition and the newly established republic would be forever in the shadow of the Treaty of Versailles. When Germans became aware of the treaty’s terms, support for the Weimar Coalition decreased almost immediately. In the elections of June 1920, the three parties garnered only 48 percent of the vote.

From the start, the U.S. government closely monitored the situation in Germany. Officials worried that discontent in Germany would generate a serious call for the return of the monarchy, or worse yet, cause a revolutionary shift to the left. American policymakers favored neither development as they hoped the Weimar Republic would stabilize and create a solidly democratic Germany. But the U.S. Senate’s failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles also meant that direct involvement in Germany would be limited as a state of war with Germany technically still existed. Since it was not bound to its terms, the Wilson administration chose to leave treaty enforcement to the other Allies and only appointed an unofficial observer to the temporary Reparation Commission. The

\[19\] Stackelberg and Winkle, eds., *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 57. When the German delegation initially saw Article 231, they protested its terms to no avail. For the Speech of the German Delegation of 7 May 1919, see Kaes, et. al., eds, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 9-12.

\[20\] Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 88.
administration of Warren G. Harding continued this practice, but more actively encouraged the U.S. representative to work on reparations compromises. The German government also requested U.S. help, asking the American commissioner, Ellis Loring Dresel, to persuade the United States to intervene in the reparations discussions. Much to the dissatisfaction of Germany, the Allies set the reparations level without American intervention in April and the Germans reluctantly agreed to the terms in May 1921. Harding’s desire for greater involvement and economic considerations led him to sign a congressional resolution unilaterally ending the war with Germany in July 1921. Despite these actions, during a critical period there would be no official diplomatic recognition of Germany and, consequently, no U.S. ambassador based in country. The Treaty of Berlin, signed in August 1921 and ratified by the U.S. Senate in November, officially ended hostilities between the two countries, and shortly thereafter, Alanson B. Houghton arrived in Germany as the new ambassador.


23 Jonas, The United States and Germany, 158-59.

The decade of the 1920s opened with the United States following a policy of watchful waiting as officials monitored developments in Germany.\textsuperscript{25} Despite not having an ambassador initially, Washington found ways to keep up on developments. Still, the establishment of diplomatic relations in the 1920s improved the American understanding of the situation in Germany. Soon reports emanating throughout Germany highlighted American fears of revolutionary activity. And sources in Bavaria began detailing the development of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.

III

As the war ended, U.S. officials closely watched the political and economic situation throughout Germany, and in Bavaria, they identified many of the issues and concerns later addressed by the National Socialists, particularly criticism of the Treaty of Versailles. Most significantly, they also recognized that despite the early success of left-wing revolutionary movements, the conditions in Bavaria were proving to be extremely complicated. The turmoil left in the wake of war seemed more pronounced there. Historically, Bavaria had been a rural, conservative, Catholic region.\textsuperscript{26} Right-wing völkisch organizations that would later condemn the peace brought by the Treaty of

\textsuperscript{25} Jonas describes the 1920s policy as one of “involvement without commitment.” Jonas, \textit{The United States and Germany}, 154. Robert Murphy will use the phrase “watchful waiting” to describe American policy as events in Bavaria heat up in late 1923. Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 17 October 1923, 862.00/1341, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{26} Bookbinder, \textit{Weimar Germany}, 73-74.
Versailles had established a considerable presence there in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{27} Yet the socialist revolution of 1918 led by Kurt Eisner raised an alarm and caused U.S. officials to keep close tabs on many of the developing political movements in Bavaria.

In the tumultuous days prior to the armistice, anti-war activist Kurt Eisner of the Independent Social Democratic Party led an impromptu takeover of Munich on 7 November 1918 in the name of the Council of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants, a group he organized earlier in the day. The following day, however, Eisner approached the Social Democratic Party leaders in Bavaria to form a coalition government. To the disappointment of many revolutionaries, he quickly proclaimed Bavaria a republic. While Eisner became the minister president of the new republic, his cabinet consisted of a majority of Social Democrats.\textsuperscript{28} This frustrated many in his own party, but Eisner never believed that socialism could be forced on Bavaria. He wanted to convince Bavarians of the need to end military involvement in the war and to replace the monarchy with a parliamentary government.\textsuperscript{29} Eisner hoped that the inclusion of the masses in the

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\textsuperscript{27} Georg Franz, “Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” The Journal of Modern History 29 (December 1957): 325-26. See also Jay Hatheway, “The Pre-1920 Origins of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” Journal of Contemporary History 29 (July 1994): 443-62. The Völkisch movement included numerous reactionary groups in Germany that were “antidemocratic, anti-Marxist, antiparliamentary, and anti-Semitic.” Orlow, A History of Modern Germany, 140.

\textsuperscript{28} David Clay Large, Where Ghosts Walked: Munich’s Road to the Third Reich (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 77-81.

democratic process would lead to the creation of a popular socialist republic.\(^{30}\) Thus, his socialist revolution quickly lost some of its radical hue.

Despite Eisner’s intentions, the Bavarian Republic did not survive for long. More an idealist than a practical politician, Eisner soon struggled to maintain power.\(^{31}\) He favored the Soviet model of direct participation of the masses through the creation of workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ councils while members of the Social Democratic Party pushed for elections for a constitutional assembly.\(^{32}\) Additionally, many Bavarian conservatives still desired a return to the monarchy, not a parliamentary system of government.\(^{33}\) They also viewed Eisner as a symbol of the type of liberal Jewish politician who they claimed had stabbed Germans in the back in the ongoing peace talks.\(^{34}\) A pacifist, Eisner supported the contention that Germany should accept responsibility for the war, a war he blamed on Kaiser Wilhelm II and Prussian militarism.\(^{35}\) He had also been born in Berlin, and Bavarians distrusted outsiders.\(^{36}\)

While most conservatives called for electoral change, the Thule Society, a radical völkisch group, actually began storing weapons and organizing armed Freikorps units to


\(^{33}\) Franz, “Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 322.

\(^{34}\) Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 157.


\(^{36}\) Franz, “Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 320.
topple the republic.\textsuperscript{37} As Eisner lost control, he agreed to elections in return for a guarantee from the Social Democrats that the councils would not be dissolved.\textsuperscript{38} The January elections proved to be damaging to Eisner and his party, the Independent Socialists, and by February he recognized the need to step down.\textsuperscript{39} Indicative of the turbulent environment that characterized post-armistice Bavaria, a conservative army veteran assassinated Eisner as he made his way to give his resignation speech.\textsuperscript{40}

Chaos ensued in Munich the day of the Eisner assassination. Gunman entered the parliament building and began shooting other elected officials.\textsuperscript{41} Bavaria’s socialist leaders attempted to reestablish control. The more conservative members of the Independent Socialist Party worked with the Social Democrats to appoint a new minister president, Johannes Hoffman, a Social Democrat, and create an emergency cabinet with the power to govern Bavaria in mid-March.\textsuperscript{42} Nevertheless, the fighting continued, and out of the turmoil in April 1919, the more radical members of the Independent Socialists gained control and proclaimed the establishment of a Soviet Republic.\textsuperscript{43} With this

\textsuperscript{37} Hatheway, “The Pre-1920 Origins of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 454. For more on the Thule Society in Bavaria, see Franz, “Munich: Birthplace and Center of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 326-29.

\textsuperscript{38} Grunberger, \textit{Red Rising in Bavaria}, 55-56.


\textsuperscript{40} Grunberger, \textit{Red Rising in Bavaria}, 78-79.

\textsuperscript{41} Large, \textit{Where Ghosts Walked}, 91-92.

\textsuperscript{42} Evans, \textit{The Coming of the Third Reich}, 158-59.

announcement, Johannes Hoffman fled Munich. From Bamberg, Hoffman attempted to rally the Bavarian military to destroy the soviet. The German government offered federal troops, but Hoffman declined, feeling that Bavarians would not support the involvement of the federal government. But the attempt itself fell short. It also led to an upheaval within the soviet itself as communists took over the leadership positions. Yet the Soviet Republic of Bavaria lasted only about six weeks. Hoffman encouraged Bavarians to start joining the volunteer paramilitary Freikorps units that had been forming since the end of World War I. In general, the units were known for being anti-Communist, anti-democratic, and racist. Hoffman recruited 35,000 members of the Freikorps and accepted federal assistance as the German government deployed units from the Reichswehr. These heavily armed forces moved in, and following weeks of bloodshed, destroyed the Soviet Republic in Bavaria.

While dramatic, the short-term success of the revolutionary left in Bavaria was just that, short term. As Bavarian politicians struggled to establish a functioning government, events in Berlin helped to ensure that the new local government would have a decidedly right-wing cast. Wolfgang Kapp, supported by right-wing paramilitary

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45 Large, Where Ghosts Walked, 113-16.

46 Grunberger, Red Rising in Bavaria, 113-14. The period under communist leadership is often referred to as the Second Soviet Republic.

47 Large, Where Ghosts Walked, 116. See also, Jones, The Birth of the Nazis.

48 Evans, The Coming of the Third Reich, 158-61.
groups, attempted to overthrow the Weimar Republic by staging a coup in Berlin in March 1920. The plotters detested the Treaty of Versailles, particularly its impact on the *Reichswehr*.  

The Kapp Putsch had the short-term success of forcing governmental officials to move temporarily out of Berlin, but a general strike soon reestablished control of Berlin and the Weimar Republic survived. The putsch, however, had a direct impact on the government of Bavaria. As the coup began in Berlin on 16 March, rightists in Bavaria organized their paramilitary groups and began pressuring socialist leaders to resign their governmental positions. Fearful of violence and chaos, socialist leaders resigned and Gustav von Kahr became the minister president of Bavaria on 17 March and the Bavarian government shifted to the right. Kahr’s Bavarian People’s Party, the largest party in the Bavarian ruling coalition, made clear its desire to restore the monarchy and created a welcoming environment for anti-republican extremists. In fact, the party illustrated Bavaria’s general dissatisfaction with the Weimar Coalition. When the Center Party agreed to become a part of the Weimar Coalition, its Bavarian members split off and created the Bavarian People’s Party. Meant to protest the centralization of power in the federal government under the new Weimar Republic, the new party still


50 Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 66-67, 97-98. For the maneuvering behind the selection of Gustav von Kahr, see Franz, “Munich: Birthplace and Center of the national Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 329-30.

51 Large, *The Politics of Law and Order*, 35-38

worked with the Center Party until 1920. In January of that year, the Bavarian People’s Party severed all ties and began pursuing constitutional revision.\(^5\)

Despite the lack of an official treaty with Germany, American officials kept abreast of these events. The initial responsibility of collecting information fell to individuals who had been involved with the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Ellis Loring Dresel and Allen Dulles had handled the State Department’s intelligence gathering during the negotiations at the peace conference. Dresel served as the head of the political intelligence section for the American Commission to Negotiate Peace.\(^5\) Dulles also worked in political intelligence as he coordinated the intelligence reports coming in from observers in central Europe.\(^5\) After the drafting of the Treaty of Versailles, Dresel held the title of U.S. commissioner to Germany from 1919 to 1921, and despite not having official status, lived in the former American Embassy in Berlin.\(^5\)

While Dresel focused on cultivating relationships in Germany, he sent Dulles out to take the pulse of the revolutionaries throughout Germany.\(^5\) Dulles submitted a detailed report on the situation in Bavaria in April 1920, soon after the Kahr government took power. Additionally, Truman Smith, who would serve as an assistant military attaché in Berlin

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\(^5\) “Dresel is Favored for Berlin Embassy,” *New York Times*, 3 September 1921.


after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, worked for Dresel as an assistant military advisor.\textsuperscript{58}

Once the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1921 with an ambassador following in 1922, the reports out of Bavaria increased. Warren G. Harding affirmed Dresel’s importance to American efforts in Germany by naming him chargé d’affaires after the U.S. Senate’s ratification of the Treaty of Berlin.\textsuperscript{59} Soon after, the administration named businessman Alanson B. Houghton the new ambassador, a selection that reflected the new approach to Germany. Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1918, Houghton had thrown himself into economic and governmental affairs.\textsuperscript{60} Once confirmed by the Senate, he made it clear that he closely followed Republican foreign policy of the decade as he believed in expanding American influence in the world and that the “importance of European stability and commerce to American prosperity” was central to his vision.\textsuperscript{61}

American officials moved quickly to analyze the situation in Bavaria in the early 1920s. William Dawson, the State Department’s consul general in Munich from 1921-1923, Tracy Lay, the consul general in Munich from 1923-1925, Robert D. Murphy, the vice consul in Munich from 1921-1925, and Truman Smith, the War Department’s assistant military attaché in Berlin, 1922-1924, provided detailed analyses of the political


\textsuperscript{60} Matthews, \textit{Alanson B. Houghton}, 34-39.

\textsuperscript{61} Matthews, \textit{Alanson B. Houghton}, 43.
situation there. 62 While Murphy later claimed Washington accepted his Bavarian reports “in silence,” Ambassador Houghton actively monitored their findings. 63 Preliminary intelligence gathering seemed to alleviate the concerns that Bavaria would be a hotbed of revolutionary activity on the left. Dulles’s report of April 1920 detailed that despite the time spent under socialist and communist control, the “political pendulum has swung far to the Right since the days of Eisner.” 64 A 15 June 1921 account praised Bavaria for continuing “to set the pace in the suppression of all movements smacking of Bolshevism.” 65 In fact, the intelligence clearly illustrated that postwar Bavaria was a breeding ground for revolutionary activity on the right.

The prevalence of revolutionary groups in Bavaria caused American observers to be concerned as the 1920s opened. Allen Dulles worried that the ruling coalition of three conservative parties in April 1920 represented just a “stop-gap” government that did not truly reflect the reactionary climate in Bavaria. 66 Neither the Bavarian government nor the Weimar Republic seemed to adequately address the ongoing dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles and the issue of war guilt. American Consul General William


64 Allen Dulles, Report on the Present Conditions in Bavaria, 10 April 1920, 862.00/924, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

65 Germany: The Political Situation, 15 June 1921, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #212, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

66 Dulles, Report on the Present Conditions in Bavaria, 10 April 1920, 862.00/924.
Dawson noted that Bavaria, and especially Munich, was the center of protest regarding the concept of the *Schuldlüge*, which Dawson defined as the “assertion that Germany is guilty of having caused the recent war.”

Bavarian discontent seemed to stem from a number of issues. First, many Bavarians remained upset with the change of government following World War I and the Treaty of Versailles. Bavaria lost any hope to regain its autonomy with the acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles and the signing of the Weimar Constitution. The Imperial Constitution of 1871 had not only allowed Bavaria to keep its monarch, but also its own parliament, armed forces, and control of its internal affairs within the empire. As Tracy Lay pointed out, under Article 17 of the Treaty of Versailles, “every state must have a republican constitution. This deprived Bavaria of her king.” In actuality, Kurt Eisner’s 1918 revolution had overthrown the monarchy, but the treaty ensured that Bavaria would be unable to reestablish it. As a result of the treaty, Bavaria lost its traditional right to send and receive ambassadors. The Weimar Constitution ensured the end of Bavaria’s autonomous operation as it did not allow for the return of the Bavarian monarchy. Thus, many Bavarians believed that the new democratic government of Germany deprived them of their right to make local decisions.

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67 William Dawson to Secretary of State, 8 February 1922, 862.00/1113, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


69 Tracy Lay to Secretary of State, 20 July 1923, 862.00/1267, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The dissatisfaction in Bavaria resulted in a large and unwieldy reactionary movement. A variety of politically conservative groups had formed to protest the establishment of a centralized democratic government in Germany, which they blamed for the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. These groups shared a general “hostility to the present parliamentary system of government.” Most of the organizations specifically called for the return of the Bavarian monarchy, although there were exceptions.

The groups were encouraged by the actions of the minister president, Gustav von Kahr, who had a series of clashes with the Weimar Republic over the centralization of power in Berlin. In the postwar period, numerous paramilitary groups organized, including the Einwohnerwehr, a civil guard movement dedicated to ensuring law and order. Not only was this movement particularly strong in Bavaria, but the Einwohnerwehr became a political power there. The federal government began pressuring Kahr to dissolve the organization, which he supported, as early as May 1920. The Allied powers had demanded that the civilian population in Germany be disarmed, and the Weimar Republic, in negotiations on reparations, feared the consequences if it

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70 Reactionary Movement in Bavaria, 4 December 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3966, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


72 The National Socialists were the biggest exception as they called for the establishment of a national dictatorship rather than a monarchy.

did not comply.\textsuperscript{74} Yet, Kahr resisted for a year, contending that the Einwohnerwehr did not challenge the unity or authority of the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, many Bavarians supported his stance as many of them believed that the Einwohnerwehr represented “their defense against communism.”\textsuperscript{76}

Over time and as the reparations negotiations continued, Kahr began making concessions. Then, in May 1921, a new chancellor, Joseph Wirth, reasserted the need for dissolution.\textsuperscript{77} Kahr succumbed to the pressure to disband the Einwohnerwehr in June 1921.\textsuperscript{78} In August, two assassinations of German officials occurred, one of them a Bavarian politician and the other the leader of the Center Party. Wirth quickly moved to solidify the control of the federal government by issuing a decree that gave the federal government the power to suspend civil rights in any district where there was an “actual or threatened disturbance of the public peace.” In particular, the federal government ordered Kahr to end martial law in Bavaria and suppress the publication of two


\textsuperscript{75} Large, The Politics of Law and Order, 66-76.


\textsuperscript{77} Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1923: Part I,” 111-12. Wirth had accepted the Allied-determined level of reparations and fulfillment of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in part to reassert the Weimar Republic’s control over disarmament in the country, thus eliminating the need for any Allied disarmament operations. Shuster, German Disarmament after World War I, 50-51.

newspapers there.\textsuperscript{79} Gustav von Kahr resigned as the minister president in September 1921 rather than submit to the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{80}

The resignation of Gustav von Kahr did not end the discord between Berlin and Bavaria. The new minister president, Count Hugo Lerchenfeld, faced new conflicts and initially tried to resolve the clash by negotiating with the federal government.\textsuperscript{81} Yet, this drew the ire of the Bavarians as they criticized Lerchenfeld as being “too weak and submissive” in his relations with Berlin. The discontent led to the election of Eugen von Knilling, the “Anti-Berlin” candidate, as the minister president of Bavaria in 1922.\textsuperscript{82} The new minister president called for a return to the pre-1918 confederation of German states to replace the current system of centralized control in Berlin.\textsuperscript{83} Even some American diplomats contended that the situation was serious enough to recommend altering the

\textsuperscript{79} Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1923: Part I,” 113-14. One of the newspapers was the Nazi organ, the \textit{Völkische Beobachter}. Martial law had been declared in Bavaria during the Kapp Putsch. Kahr continued it after he became minister president. Large, \textit{The Politics of Law and Order}, 36-39.

\textsuperscript{80} Carl Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1923: Part I,” 112-15. Gustav von Kahr tried to negotiate some changes to the decree, particularly dealing with ending martial law, but resigned when rebuked. American officials noted that he continued to be popular, and that it was “safe to say that he has probably not disappeared from the political arena.” Germany: The Political Situation, 15 September 1921, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #336, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{81} Germany: The Political Situation, 30 September 1921, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #339, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


\textsuperscript{83} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
German constitution to create a loose confederation; otherwise, elements in Bavaria would persist in their efforts for “monarchial restoration.”

Coverage of political discussions in Bavaria also illustrated that a strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism had become pronounced in Germany following the war. In his 1920s travels, Allen Dulles argued that “the pre-war tolerance” of Jews had shifted due to “the participation in and the leadership of Communism in Bavaria by the Jews.” He believed that anti-Semitism was particularly strong “among the students, the military and the peasants of south Bavaria.” Much like the dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles, anti-Semitism was not just found in the general population. Following an interview of Eugen von Knilling in 1922, Robert Murphy reported that Knilling was an anti-Semite who felt that anti-Semitism was “strong and increasing” in Bavaria. An overall State Department analysis of Germany highlighted the situation in Bavaria, by asserting that “the Bavarians are Nationalists in the first place, extremely anti-Semitic in the second, and to a certain extent separationists.”

The question of separatism in Bavaria particularly vexed American officials. Early on, they did not quite agree on the potential of separatism in Bavaria. Dulles contended that while talk of separatism remained low in 1920, if democracy faltered and

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84 Lay to State, 20 July 1923, 862.00/1267.
85 Dulles, Report on the Present Conditions in Bavaria, 10 April 1920, 862.00/924.
86 Murphy to State, 25 November 1922, 862.00/1172.
87 Enclosure to Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State, Warden Wilson report “Reaction in Germany,” 9 February 1923, 862.00/1216, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
a socialist or communist government came to power, Bavaria would seemingly take the opportunity to break away from Germany. At the same time, though, some American officials believed that the fear of a revolutionary movement on the left having success was overblown. Tracy Lay argued that “to the outside world it has been made to appear that a gigantic struggle is under way between fascism and communism, whereas in reality both of these factors are almost negative.” He attributed the political tension in Bavaria to being “a struggle for autonomy within the commonwealth equivalent to that enjoyed under the Empire.” In fact, he felt the tension in Bavaria really compared to a political debate between competing ideas of power. Lay contended, “as in the United States the original division of political opinion was Anti-federalist and opposed to the Federalist idea, so with respect to Bavaria and the Reich, the issue is Federalism versus Unitary Centralization.”

As American policymakers monitored the dissatisfaction and the anti-Semitism, one constant in their approach was the continual evaluation of leaders of Germany and any political movements that developed. From the outset, many officials feared that Germany would not produce the leader necessary to bring the country back into the international arena and deal with popular discontent. After traveling through Bavaria and talking to its political leaders in 1920, Allen Dulles concluded that “Bavaria, like the rest of Germany, suffers from the lack of strong leaders.” For those in Bavaria, his concern was that the “members of the present Government are largely bureaucrats who, for the

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88 Tracy Lay to Secretary of State, 25 June 1923, 862.00/1257, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
most part, have had no previous executive experience.” The issue of leaders who lacked experience or who were inadequate in other ways would prove to be a concern for American evaluators throughout the 1920s.

Thus, in the early 1920s, American intelligence reports suggested that Bavarians tended to be critical of the Treaty of Versailles, anti-Semitic, and in favor of more local control—all elements that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party would manipulate in the years to come. U.S. officials were aware of Hitler’s charisma and the growing strength of the National Socialists almost from the beginning. Yet, they would often argue that as a leader, Hitler had not yet proven himself capable. And as long as that was the case, the Nazis were not an organization to be feared.

IV

The American perception of National Socialism itself began emerging at the same time that policymakers honed their understanding of Bavaria. As diplomats reported in from the field regarding political developments, the growth of this radical right-wing organization did not receive extensive coverage, yet officials marked it as a potentially strong movement. While the actual numbers of National Socialists were uncertain, their message of anti-Semitism and the revision of the Treaty of Versailles did seem to

89 Dulles, Report on the Present Conditions in Bavaria, 10 April 1920, 862.00/924.

90 Tracy Lay contended that one of the problems was that there was “a plague of political leaders who intrigue among themselves and advertise their movements by militant demonstrations.” Lay to State, 25 June 1923, 862.00/1257.
generate some support, and American officials took notice of the party and its leader, Adolf Hitler.\textsuperscript{91}

The National Socialist German Workers’ Party developed in the turbulent city of Munich during a period when the political stability of Bavaria was in question. The NSDAP initially formed in January 1919 as the German Workers’ Party. The Nazis were only one of about forty “counterrevolutionary organizations active in Munich in early 1919.”\textsuperscript{92} In April 1920, the name changed to the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.\textsuperscript{93} Adolf Hitler came in contact with the movement in its first year. The Bavarian Reichswehr commanders closely monitored postwar political organizations and Hitler attended a meeting in his official capacity as an indoctrination official.\textsuperscript{94} He quickly joined and led the group by 1921.\textsuperscript{95} Despite the early formation of the party, U.S. officials had very little direct contact with it or Adolf Hitler throughout the 1920s.

\textsuperscript{91} A 3 November 1922 military intelligence report, citing a New York Herald correspondent, reported the National Socialist Party [sic] under the leadership of Hitler had a membership of 60,000 men. However, Robert Murphy noted that Hitler was “credited with a following of 4,000 faithful…” Development of a Fascist Movement in Bavaria, 3 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-194, Report #3849, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Murphy to State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165.

\textsuperscript{92} Orlow, A History of Modern Germany, 140-42.

\textsuperscript{93} Jackson J. Spielvogel, Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 28.

\textsuperscript{94} Hatheway, “The Pre-1920 Origins of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” 458.

\textsuperscript{95} It was Hitler who first presented the Party Program on 24 February 1920. For the program, see document 14 in Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, eds., Inside Hitler’s Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 72-75. Hitler won control of the party in a July 1921 power struggle and demanded dictatorial control. Spielvogel, Hitler and Nazi Germany, 29.
Nevertheless, the American understanding of National Socialism did begin developing in the early 1920s via U.S. diplomatic and military intelligence reports.

The earliest American view of the Nazi Party seemed to be that it was a growing nationalistic party, but it really did not set off any alarms. While a visible presence in the early 1920s, the Nazis were categorized as a typical party in conservative Bavaria. In particular, the party criticized the Treaty of Versailles, embraced anti-Semitism, and had a leader of questionable strength. Early on, the only significant difference about the Nazis was their call for a national dictatorship when most of the reactionary parties on the right called for the return of the monarchy. U.S. officials believed that this point alone would limit the Nazis’ popularity and ultimately discounted the probability that the movement would effect any dramatic change in Germany. Initially, those responsible for managing U.S.-German relations tended to see this nationalistic party with untested leadership and unverified membership levels as more an illustration of dissatisfaction with the post-World War I situation than a radical new development in Germany.

As the party grew and strengthened under Hitler’s leadership, U.S. officials had a propensity to lump it with other nationalist groups and discount its influence beyond the local stage. While there seemed to be an understanding that the Nazis were developing a following, the party was not deemed a threat. Thus, Americans observers failed to identify its potential. Additionally, conflicting and, at times, contradictory reports about the movement and its leader appeared in this period. Most reports acknowledged Adolf

96 The official stated aim of the Nazis was the establishment of a national dictatorship. See Murphy to State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165; Reactionary Movement in Bavaria, 4 December 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3966.
Hitler’s anti-Semitism, oratorical skills, and understanding of the Bavarian locals, but many questioned whether these traits would be enough to create lasting change. As the leader of a major movement, Hitler remained untested in the early 1920s, something many U.S. officials considered a reason for skepticism. These questions aside, the early coverage of the National Socialists portrayed a small but developing movement with a charismatic leader that came onto the American radar in 1922 and gained strength throughout most of 1923.

As the Nazis became more vocal and gained support, the reports more directly addressed the party and its leader, Adolf Hitler. In initial accounts, the growth of the Nazis did not receive extensive coverage, yet most officials, including Murphy and Smith, marked the NSDAP as a potentially strong movement. Central in reporting on the National Socialists were the U.S. Military Intelligence Division (MID) and American diplomatic officials, both those based in Munich and those stationed in Berlin, with Robert D. Murphy, the vice consul in Munich, and Truman Smith, the assistant military attaché in Germany, providing the most detailed reporting. Much of the information came from interviews of Bavarian officials and other intelligence gathering activities, but soon after Americans became aware of Hitler and the Nazis, Ambassador Houghton directed Truman Smith to meet with the party leader and report back about the party itself.97

While diplomatic reports emanating from Bavaria documented the existence of the National Socialists and the fact that Hitler led the party, classifying the party and providing accurate details about it and its leader proved difficult at first. From the start, many U.S. officials tried to describe Hitler and the Nazis as the German equivalent of Benito Mussolini and the Fascists in Italy.\footnote{Development of a Fascisti Movement in Bavaria, 3 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3849.} The Nazis seemed to reinforce this connection themselves as they praised the success of the Fascists in establishing order in Italy and suggested they would do the same for Germany. Robert Murphy contended that the Nazis actively modeled the success of the Fascists and that Hitler “is regarded by his followers as the Bavarian Mussolini.”\footnote{Murphy to State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165.} A clearer impression of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists began developing in 1922 as the party increased its agitation efforts and brought itself to the attention of military intelligence and the State Department after the June assassination of Walther Rathenau.

Völkisch organizations throughout Germany had opposed Rathenau, Germany’s foreign minister, because he was Jewish and had supported the Wirth government’s policy of fulfillment of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.\footnote{“Germans Repress Royalist Terror,” \textit{New York Times}, 26 June 1922. Prior to becoming the foreign minister, Rathenau had served as the minister of reconstruction and had actually helped Wirth develop the policy of fulfillment. Rathenau did not believe that Germany would be able to fulfill the terms of the treaty or reparations, but felt that Germany needed to do its best and once failing in fulfillment, would prove to the Allies the need for revision of terms. Marshall Dill, Jr., \textit{Germany: A Modern History Revised and Enlarged} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 286.} Following the assassination, the Wirth government acted quickly to ensure that further assassinations or
other acts of terrorism against the government did not occur. With the support of the Reichstag, the Weimar Republic issued the “Law for the Protection of the Republic.” The law itself had multiple elements and required a two-thirds majority vote in the Reichstag as it made changes to the Weimar Constitution.\textsuperscript{101} The first part detailed the terms of punishment under the new law. The first article put punishment at “death or life-long imprisonment at hard labor” for those who took part in a murder or attempted murder of a member of the “republican government of the Reich.” It also detailed punishments for those who were members of organizations that aimed to murder or assault officials, denounced or slandered officials, or owned weapons. The second part of the law established a federal court system for the prosecution of cases with members of the court being appointed by the president of Germany. The third and fourth sections specified that the federal government had the prerogative to outlaw organizations that would potentially promote the undermining of the constitutional republican government of Germany and censor periodicals that violated the terms of the law.\textsuperscript{102}

This law exacerbated the tension between the federal government and Bavaria, and American officials monitored the developments. U.S. military intelligence noted that

\textsuperscript{101} Political Consequences of Rathenau’s Murder, 25 July 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3540, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{102} U.S. military intelligence deemed the law significant enough to send a translated copy as an official report. Law for the Protection of the Republic, 21 July 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3525, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
the provision providing for the creation of a federal court most offended Bavarians. 103 Due to their objections to the suppression of civil rights, the Bavarian government issued an ordinance challenging the authority of the federal government. 104 Among various issues, Bavarian officials contended that they would recognize the right of the federal government to assert that participation in a conspiracy against the government merited punishment; yet, based on article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, the officials argued that the cases brought should be left in the hands of the Bavarian government. 105 In justifying their order, the Bavarian government contended that the presidential appointment of judges to a federal court examining “political criminal actions” would infringe on “the fundamentals of true democracy.” Bavarians feared the “political leanings” of those chosen for the court. 106

This challenge to federal authority increased the tensions between Berlin and Bavaria. The federal government acted quickly, issuing an official communiqué calling Bavaria’s actions not only illegal, as “for the first time since the formation of the Reich a situation has come up in which a state government has refused recognition for its territory.


104 Military intelligence provided a translated version of the state order of 24 July 1922. Bavarian Opposition to Law for the Protection of the Republic, 2 August 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3561, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


to a federal law, passed in a constitutional manner,” but also “null and void.” Despite the fact that the majority of Bavarian officials had supported direct opposition to the federal law, minister president Lerchenfeld agreed to repeal the emergency decree once the federal government agreed to insert some “Bavarian home rule safeguards” into federal law. As a consequence of the compromise, many nationalistic völkisch organizations began agitating against both the Bavarian government and the Weimar Republic. At the same time, Germany’s financial system faltered. In November 1922, Lerchenfeld resigned under pressure as “he had sacrificed Bavarian state rights in his compromise with Berlin” and Wirth would resign when Germany could not keep up with reparations payments.108

In this climate, the United States began directly monitoring the NSDAP. Like other revolutionary groups, the Nazis expressed “hostility to the present parliamentary system of government.” 109 Most reports identified the strong strain of anti-Semitism present in the movement and the party’s calls for a national dictatorship. There also seemed to be a growing awareness of Hitler’s ability to relate to discontented Bavarians. U.S. military intelligence forwarded information from a newspaper correspondent that related that “their leader, an Austrian by the name of Hitler, is a good politician and


109 Reactionary Movement in Bavaria, 4 December 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3966.
thoroughly understands the Bavarian psychology.‖ Robert Murphy agreed that Hitler “understands local prejudices” and was exploiting the discontent. At the same time, there remained some incorrect information. Murphy reported that Hitler was a naturalized German from Czechoslovakia. There was also some debate as to the strength of the party, with estimates ranging between 4,000 and 60,000 members.

Working together, military intelligence and the American Embassy concluded they needed a better understanding of the party and its leader. Ambassador Houghton arranged for Truman Smith to be loaned to the embassy in order to interview Adolf Hitler and other Bavarian notables in November 1922. Before Smith’s departure, Robert Murphy, the acting consul in Bavaria at the time, briefed him on the political situation in Bavaria and on the officials he would be visiting. As a whole, Smith’s interviews reaffirmed much of the general U.S. understanding of Bavaria and the political situation throughout the early 1920s. Overall, a great deal of revolutionary activity was happening on the right in Bavaria and many of the groups were anti-Semitic. A major concern was

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111 Murphy to State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165.

112 Development of a Fascisti Movement in Bavaria, 3 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3849; Murphy to State, 10 November 1922, 862.00/1165; Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert, 64.


the lack of local control as the Weimar Republic centralized power in Berlin. Additionally, dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles remained prevalent.\textsuperscript{115}

Most of the Bavarian officials Smith interviewed reflected positively on the efforts of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. They believed the NSDAP to be a growing organization but did not consider it a direct threat to the Bavarian government. Dissenters to this general line feared that the economic problems in Bavaria might lead the party to become more revolutionary and gain more adherents.\textsuperscript{116} The party’s anti-Semitism was not a cause for concern; in fact, a military official interviewed contended that the party was anti-Semitic in “a healthy sense.”\textsuperscript{117} Most also agreed that Adolf Hitler’s success was due in part to his speaking abilities. Smith’s notes of his meetings described Hitler as “an oratorical genius” and a “remarkable personality,” depictions that Smith’s own experience reinforced.\textsuperscript{118} After attending a party rally and having a personal interview with Hitler, Smith himself described Hitler as “a marvelous demagogue. I have rarely listened to such a logical and fanatical man. His power over the mob must be immense.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} Political Conditions in Bavaria, 28 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3951, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Reactionary Movement in Bavaria, 4 December 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3966.

\textsuperscript{116} Hessen, ed., \textit{Berlin Alert}, 51-55.

\textsuperscript{117} Hessen, ed., \textit{Berlin Alert}, 53.

\textsuperscript{118} Hessen, ed., \textit{Berlin Alert}, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{119} Hessen, ed., \textit{Berlin Alert}, 60.
Smith also took the time to interview those outside the Bavarian government, including the press. The editors Smith interviewed tended to follow the same lines as the officials when it came to their understanding of the situation in Bavaria, expressing concern about the centralization of power in Berlin and viewing the Nazis as a growing party. They did not believe, however, that the Nazis posed an immediate threat to the government of Bavaria. Smith agreed. While the NSDAP was the most active political force in Bavaria, he contended that the “movement has been relatively . . . unimportant.” So in many ways, the message was that the strength of the Nazis had indeed increased, but that they did not represent an imminent threat to Bavaria.

Smith’s interviews and later analysis fit in well with the other reports coming out of Bavaria at the end of 1922. In his year-end report, Robert Murphy centered the National Socialists in the tumult of Bavaria, but like many Bavarian officials, he suggested “that the large amount of smoke hides a modest fire.” All of the reports agreed that the Nazis were gaining in strength. Additionally, U.S. officials blamed the Bavarian government itself for allowing the growth of the Nazis. Smith believed that “it

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121 Conditions in Bavaria-The National Socialist Labor Party, 25 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3933, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

122 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 16 January 1923, 862.00/1203, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

123 Conflict over membership levels continued, but Smith argued that the Nazi Party was “acquiring a political influence in Bavaria quite disproportionate to its actual numerical strength.” Conditions in Bavaria-The National Socialist Labor Party, 25 November 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3933.
is an unquestionable fact, that a large part of the success achieved by Hittler [sic] is due to the policy of non-interference, laying aside actual sympathy, extended towards him by the Bavarian Government.124 Murphy contended that the government allowed the Nazis because the group “provides vent for the inevitable outcroppings of public discontent which lies so near the surface of things in Bavaria during this period of economic disorder.”125 American officials in Bavaria maintained that the only real difference between the Nazis and other revolutionary groups was the National Socialist desire to establish a national dictatorship rather than return to a monarchial form of government. This last distinction, however, did not seem to carry weight outside Bavaria. While Ambassador Houghton made sure to mention his concern about the Bavarian turmoil and the rising Nazi Party in his reports to the secretary of state, he also claimed that Hitler’s movement supported the return of the monarchy.126

The overall American analysis of those based in Germany was that the National Socialists had made gains throughout 1922 because of the dissatisfaction in Bavaria, but that the party and its leader would not be able to translate that into anything substantial. Washington did not seem to take notice of reports from Bavaria, particularly any dealing directly with the Nazi Party. Things would quickly change.


125 Murphy to State, 25 November 1922, 862.00/1172.

126 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 69.
Despite American beliefs that the NSDAP was not a party to be feared, 1923 proved that to some degree the party had been underestimated. After the year was over, Robert Murphy contended that the party had “developed into a Frankenstein monster for the government.” Events in Germany at the beginning of the year provided the National Socialists with fuel to stoke the discontent in Bavaria. In January 1923, France and Great Britain had moved into the Ruhr because Germany had stopped making reparations payments. Germany passively resisted by refusing to restart the payments and the European powers feared that the new chancellor, Wilhelm Cuno, planned on violating the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler and the Nazis then spent the year trying to channel Bavarian dissatisfaction with the lack of an aggressive response by the federal government into an active revolutionary movement.

Hitler and the National Socialists hoped to agitate and gain support for an insurrection before the Cuno cabinet could resolve the dispute; the increased activity of the Nazis, however, concerned segments of the Bavarian government. While Eugen von Knilling tended to lean toward supporting the challenge to the federal government, the

127 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 5 January 1924, 862.00/1397, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

128 The Bavarian government had suspended constitutional guarantees after this event because the Nazis seemed to be organizing a putsch in reaction. Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State, 27 January 1923, 862.00/1195, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Bavarian People’s Party began to fear that the National Socialists were planning a putsch.\(^{130}\) In order to regain control, the government suspended constitutional guarantees on 26 January.\(^{131}\) Groups throughout Bavaria, including the Nazis, were informed that organized meetings and celebrations were prohibited. Quickly, the Nazis jumped into action and convinced General Otto von Lossow, the commander of the *Reichswehr* in Bavaria, to successfully intervene on their behalf.\(^{132}\) Thus, despite the imposition of martial law in Bavaria, the government allowed the Nazis to hold their January convention, while at the same time refusing to give permits to several other groups.\(^{133}\) Because of their concerns, however, the Bavarian government sent an extra battalion of the *Reichswehr* to operate “in and about Munich.”\(^{134}\)

The January meeting seemed to refocus diplomatic attention on the Nazi Party. The reports began to delve into the history of the party and directly address both the party program and the ideas expressed by the National Socialists. The Nazis had issued a twenty-five point program back in 1920. Yet, American diplomatic reports had never analyzed that program and did not pass along a copy until the turmoil of 1923. Robert


\(^{131}\) Houghton to State, 27 January 1923, 862.00/1195.

\(^{132}\) Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic: Part II,” 211.

\(^{133}\) Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 3 March 1923, 862.00/1220, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{134}\) Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 2 February 1923, 862.00/1212, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Murphy’s analysis of the program both reinforced the American understanding of the party and led to more evaluation of it.

Murphy continued to stress that the National Socialists sought to create a dictatorship. After reading the party program, he concluded moreover that the Nazis intended this to be a dictatorship that went beyond the existing territorial boundaries of Germany. As he reported to the State Department, the “party proposes a united German people including Austrians, Czech nationals who are of German blood, etc., under the dictatorship of a strong man – a Bismark [sic].” He also noted that throughout the platform, the Nazis expressed a grave opposition to Jews, blaming them for “the evils of the present financial system” and portraying them “as a menace to society.” Perhaps the most important point Murphy made was that while the Nazi argument was weak on evidence, there were many Germans who wanted to believe in the party. Soon after his examination of the Nazi program, Murphy became very concerned about rumors circulating in Germany that Henry Ford was a contributor to the party. He was worried enough to request and secure a meeting with Hitler, who denied receiving any donations from Ford.

The beginning of the year had thus proven problematic for the American understanding of the Nazis. U.S. officials had initially believed that the party did not represent a threat, yet 1923 had opened with a cause for concern. Events in Bavaria had

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135 Murphy to State, 3 March 1923, 862.00/1220.

136 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 17 March 1923, 862.00/1228, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
become very complicated and the situation was proving to be unpredictable due to the “Fascist Nationalist movement.” While embassy bureaucrats believed that Hitler was a man of “ordinary ability” who had “failed to accomplish anything,” they felt that the “extreme Nationalist feeling in Bavaria” paired with both anti-Semitism and a belief in separatism had already created a “dangerous” situation. The unchecked agitation by the radical nationalists calling for a racially united Germany that included territories lost in World War I continued to erode any support Bavarians had for the Weimar Republic. Warden Wilson, the second secretary of the American embassy, warned that as long as the Weimar Republic failed to act aggressively to eradicate this extreme nationalism “the foundation for the next war is being laid and is being deeply laid.”\footnote{Enclosure to Houghton to State, Wilson report “Reaction in Germany,” 9 February 1923, 862.00/1216.}

Over the next few months, fears of an immediate problem again dissipated. Initially, Hitler attempted to flex his muscles. Prior to the traditional Socialist May Day celebration, the Nazi leader unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Bavarian government to prohibit the gathering.\footnote{Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic: Part II,” 211-12.} Undeterred, the Nazis organized a counter demonstration with 2,000 “‘shock troops’ fully outfitted with side arms, steel helmets, uniforms, etc.” The Bavarian government had been prepared, though, and the Reichswehr and Bavarian police had prevented Nazis with “bomb throwers and machine
guns” from colliding with the revelers.\textsuperscript{139} Despite the Nazis’ best efforts, they were unable to disrupt the festivities.

Additionally, the actions of the party had spurred some Bavarians to action. Hitler had gone to General Lossow, hoping he would use his clout to shut down the May Day celebration. Lossow had refused to do so and had also refused to arm the Nazis. Hitler disregarded Lossow’s denial of arms and had his forces go to military depots for the weapons. This action angered Lossow and he had the Reichswehr support the police during the May Day demonstrations.\textsuperscript{140} Shortly after that, Gustav von Kahr, the former minister president, began criticizing the actions of the National Socialists. In a 9 May speech, he contended that “many feel today that they are called upon to guide the reins of government and in their ignorance of the relevancy of things and of the effectiveness of political negotiation believe themselves capable of correcting the destiny and psychology of a nation with fiery speech or several machine guns.” The events led American officials to believe that the party “was on the wane.”\textsuperscript{141} From his base in Munich, Tracy Lay contended that the problem in Bavaria was its dissatisfaction with the Weimar Republic and the growing centralization of power in Berlin. Local turmoil occurred in part because the people of Bavaria did not know where to channel their nationalistic feelings. When it came to the potential of the NSDAP, Lay argued that “the importance

\textsuperscript{139} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 15 May 1923, 862.00/1250, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{140} Landauer, “The Bavarian Problem in the Weimar Republic: Part II,” 212.

\textsuperscript{141} Murphy to State, 15 May 1923, 862.00/1250.
of [Hitler’s] movement has been exaggerated. It bears no resemblance to fascism either in purport or import and at present seems to be on the wane.”  

According to U.S. reports, however, there continued to be revolutionary activity throughout Bavaria. Numerous right-wing organizations claimed to be fighting communism. American reports, however, stressed that “there is no bolshevism nor menace of bolshevism in Bavaria.” What had become clear to American officials by 1923 was that the true danger came from the revolutionary right rather than the communist left, which the Bavarian government had basically destroyed. And American officials really doubted that it would redevelop as “by and large the Bavarian public has no sympathy with communism or anything that savors of bolshevism.”

During this period, the Nazis continued to meet and organize public displays of strength. Emergency decrees of the federal and local government did constrain them somewhat, forcing them to drill outside of Munich, instead of in it. American officials maintained their position that the party was not a serious threat to the Bavarian government, that the Nazis were just gaining steam from general discontent, and that in reality, the Nazi Party would soon lose whatever position it did hold. The National

142 Lay to State, 25 June 1923, 862.00/1257.

143 Lay to State, 20 July 1923, 862.00/1267.

144 Murphy to State, 5 January 1924, 862.00/1397.

145 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 28 May 1923, 862.00/1254, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Socialists, however, forced a major reevaluation upon American officials with their attempted overthrow of the Weimar Republic in November 1923.

VI

The Weimar Republic had struggled during its first years and continued to do so throughout the second half of 1923. In August 1923, a new coalition took power with Gustav Stresemann as chancellor and foreign minister. Immediately, Stresemann had to deal with the ongoing crisis over the Ruhr region. He acted quickly, resuming the earlier policy of fulfillment, under which Germany would resume payment of reparations and follow the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. At the same time, Stresemann would try to renegotiate those very terms. Many in Germany opposed this approach. Additionally, the year had seen left-wing revolutions in Germany and inflation was rampant throughout the country. The instability at the national level, Stresemann’s government would fall in October and then be reorganized, further illustrated the nation’s turmoil. Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists viewed this as an opportunity to strike while discontent with the government was high.

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146 Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 192.


Initially, American officials described the situation in Bavaria as one of “watchful waiting’ with the reactionary groups in complete control.” The left-wing unrest in Germany as a whole had led Eugen von Knilling to appoint Gustav von Kahr special state commissioner, in order to marshal the reactionary right to oppose any revolutionary activity from the left in Bavaria. Kahr and the other groups desired a strong push for the return of the monarchy. As had always been the case, the Nazis did not agree with the other extremist groups in Bavaria as they continued to push for a national dictatorship. But all of the groups wanted the overthrow of the Weimar Republic. On 6 November, Kahr cautioned the right-wing groups against any independent action, as he believed they would have more success if they worked together.

Ignoring the push toward cooperation, Adolf Hitler launched his own putsch on 8 November 1923. Desiring to end the Weimar Republic as a whole, Hitler believed that the time would soon pass when he would have enough support for such an action. Because his larger goal was the overthrow of Weimar, Hitler believed he needed the support of Bavarian government officials. On 8 November 1923, Hitler and his supporters marched in on a meeting of Kahr and Bavarian officials at a Munich Beer

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149 Murphy to State, 17 October 1923, 862.00/1341.
150 Bookbinder, Weimar Germany, 78.
152 Murphy to State, 17 October 1923, 862.00/1341.
According to an eyewitness report, the Bavarian officials hesitated to go with Hitler, but then went to confer with him. Diverging reports of the conversation soon appeared, but at the time, Hitler believed he had the support of the officials, so the following day the Nazis marched to the War Ministry. Instead of being welcomed, however, they were met by armed police; a gun battle ensued, and the leaders of the putsch were arrested. The Bavarian government had been taken by surprise. Even Kahr had underestimated the goals and ability of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. Yet, the Bavarian government quickly managed to regain control with the help of the Reichswehr.

The Beer Hall Putsch also surprised U.S. policymakers. Despite having diplomats based in Munich, they had a poor understanding of the putsch as it unfolded. This stemmed from confusion among American officials and their inability to send dispatches out of the state. Robert Murphy managed to notify the State Department via telegrams that a putsch had begun on 8 November 1923. He also understood that Hitler and the

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154 Evans, The Coming of the Third Reich, 192-93.
157 Robert D. Murphy tel to Secretary of State, 9 November 1923, 862.00/1337, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
158 Robert D. Murphy tel to Secretary of State, 8 November 1923, 862.00/1338, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
159 Murphy tel to State, 8 November 1923, 862.00/1338; Robert D. Murphy to State, 8 November 1923, 862.00/1356, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Nazis had announced a national revolution in Germany and that the NSDAP hoped not only to take control of Bavaria but also to overthrow the Weimar Republic. After the initial telegrams out of Munich, communications between the Bavarian capital and Berlin were cut off. Without contact with Munich, the American Embassy in Berlin tried to sort out the events of 8 and 9 November as officials integrated information from Munich with what they could ascertain in Berlin.

As things settled down, the ultimate failure of the National Socialist-led coup left a lasting impression on American policymakers. Just days after the putsch, Ambassador Houghton hoped this would be the end of Hitler and the Nazi Party. He contended that the Nazis “had little strength in Bavaria and no strength elsewhere” anyway. Following the Beer Hall Putsch, American officials tended to dismiss the NSDAP and its leaders as a whole. The message that the United States took from these events was that it had been correct all along about Hitler and the National Socialists. U.S. officials had questioned Hitler as he had not shown himself to be a capable leader, and they saw the failed coup as proof that Hitler did not have what it took to lead a successful political movement. The standard American view of the Nazis was that they were at best a rather unorganized group lacking a clear ideology to attract followers. The putsch had proven

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160 Murphy contended that Hitler planned “to march on Berlin.” Murphy tel to State, 8 November 1923, 862.00/1338.

161 While telephone and telegraph transmissions had been cut, American diplomats were using ground transportation to convey information within Germany and to outside agencies. Murphy to State, 8 November 1923, 862.00/1356.

162 Alanson Houghton tel to Secretary of State, 10 November 1923, 862.00/1339, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
that the party had failed to attract an adequate number of supporters. Robert Murphy claimed the putsch was a “stupid fiasco” and that “the abortive and badly staged attempt demonstrated the impractical illusions under which Hitler and his supporters labored.”

Even the reaction of the Bavarian government seemed to support the U.S. position. Minister president Eugen von Knilling called Hitler’s efforts in the putsch “tragicomic” and claimed that Hitler had shown himself to be “totally incapable” of leading a revolutionary movement.

The subsequent trial, conviction, and imprisonment of Hitler and a handful of Nazis reinforced these beliefs. U.S. policymakers trusted that the Bavarian government would limit the power and authority of the National Socialists following the coup and that those measures would be effective. Even as they monitored the trial, American officials tended to dismiss the abilities of Hitler and those involved in the putsch, citing the “primitiveness of their political thought.” And despite the continued existence of the NSDAP after the putsch participants’ trial, U.S. officials reported the party’s imminent

163 Murphy to State, 5 January 1924, 862.00/1397.

164 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 6 December 1923, 862.00/1378, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

165 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 29 February 1924, 862.00/1440, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
demise. In their view, the revolutionary activity on the right had not been “extinguished” in Bavaria, but the National Socialists had been removed from the equation.166

Despite being aware of the NSDAP, American officials failed to assess accurately the growing threat of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists in the early 1920s. Their initial reports suggested a developing movement with a charismatic leader. The Beer Hall Putsch had been a surprise, but its failure led U.S. observers to view the National Socialists as nothing more than rabble rousers who had caused some problems and who ultimately would not develop into a genuine political party. And the untested Hitler had proven incapable of making a broad political impact on Bavaria, let alone Germany. While Hitler and the National Socialists had been unsuccessful in their early efforts, American policymakers had failed to properly appreciate the popularity of the movement and its leader despite its lack of impact on interwar Bavaria. U.S. officials opened 1924 reporting the impending collapse of the NSDAP, but they would soon find that the party was far from disappearing.

166 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 10 March 1924, 862.00/1469, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Chapter 3

Early Dismissal: U.S. Officials Reject the Possibility of a Recovery for the Nazis

I

U.S. governmental perceptions of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists continued to take shape throughout the mid-1920s. As 1924 opened, U.S. officials closely observed developments throughout Germany. The trial of the participants in the failed Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923 proved to be of particular interest. Many American policymakers believed that the combination of the failed putsch and the subsequent trial would end Hitler’s popularity and lead to the demise of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. Reports from 1924 and 1925 noting that the party’s strength in both membership and electoral support seemed to be diminishing appeared to fulfill such predictions. Nevertheless, the NSDAP persisted, albeit in a different form, as did its leader.

American officials believed that the failed coup of late 1923 would trigger a collapse of the Nazi Party for numerous reasons. Their previous analyses of the party, for example, had emphasized Hitler’s failure to prove himself to be a strong leader and noted that the party itself seemed to thrive on general discontent in Bavaria rather than on any solid party program. The failed putsch appeared to support these contentions.
Additionally, even before the coup, some local governments had started banning the Nazi Party, and the Bavarian government followed suit, outlawing the party during the putsch. The ban in Bavaria meant that the party had lost its geographical stronghold. Due to the trial, it also seemed likely that the party leader, Adolf Hitler, would soon be incarcerated or even deported back to Austria. These developments suggested that the Nazis would be unable to regroup after the coup. Yet, the Bavarian ban was only in effect until 16 February 1925.\(^1\) In the interim, Hitler and the Nazis did not simply fade away. Although they had been unsuccessful in their attempt to take over the government, they had not outlived their popularity. Believers in National Socialism struggled to reorganize and reconstitute the party following the failed coup, persevering as they remade themselves as a legitimate political party through participation in the electoral process.

The weaknesses of the party during this period hindered the development of accurate American perceptions of Hitler and the Nazis by limiting the ability of U.S. officials to fully scrutinize their actions. While the NSDAP continued to exist in some parts of Germany, it had few members. The party also suffered due to Adolf Hitler’s official renunciation of leadership.\(^2\) Without Hitler as the leader, the party lost its focus. Many Nazi Party members responded to the situation by moving on to join different political movements, including the Völkische Bloc, a new organization formed in January.

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1924 that recognized Adolf Hitler and fellow putsch participant Erich Ludendorff as the leaders of Germany’s völkisch movement. The U.S. government watched the group, which worked to win elections in the parliamentary system via various political parties. Electoral success proved elusive as most National Socialist adherents joined a variety of regional conservative and patriotic parties that despite sharing similar characteristics were only loosely linked to the völkisch movement.

The disorganized and sprawling nature of the National Socialist movement and its lack of clear leadership tested the ability of American observers to properly monitor it. Had the initial American analysis that the failed putsch would lead to the demise of Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers Party been correct, the basic coverage of these years would have been more than adequate as U.S. officials continued to evaluate Germany’s right-wing organizations and referenced the actions of Adolf Hitler on a regular basis. But in contradiction to their general belief that the National Socialists were no longer a threat, American officials consistently reported the perseverance of the party, albeit, often without comprehensive details regarding how it was able to persist. Through all of this, no thorough reevaluation of Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP occurred.

II

After the unsuccessful Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923, American officials dismissed the Nazis’ ability to recover. Constant observation of the party prior to the

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coup had led most policymakers to believe that neither it nor its leader was capable of making a dramatic impact on German society. The putsch reinforced this view and officials considered its failure a visible defeat for the party. In some ways, these feelings carried over as many American observers regarded the subsequent trial itself as a formality. U.S. officials had been entirely dismissive of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in the days following the putsch. While disagreeing about the future of the reactionary movement as a whole, they believed it a foregone conclusion that the participants would be dealt with decisively. Ambassador Alanson B. Houghton believed the failed coup also represented the end of the reactionary movement in Bavaria, while Robert Murphy, still the consul in charge in Munich, disagreed. That said, both transmitted confident accounts from Munich and Berlin detailing the lead-up to the trial and the trial itself.

The same dispatches documented issues that U.S. officials should have been examining more thoroughly. One involved the trial being held in Bavaria. Initially, Germany’s Ministry of Justice had decided to try the conspirators before the Supreme Court as the precipitating event leading to the trial had been an attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic. But American reports noted that the trial would be held in Bavaria with no real explanation. U.S. military intelligence pointed out that despite the fact that the coup had been directed not only at the Bavarian government but also at the national government, the trial would be held in Bavaria, by a Bavarian court, and would not

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address the broader goals of the putsch. Robert Murphy also failed to analyze the reasons for holding the trial in Bavaria, although he provided specifics about the structure of the Bavarian court. Murphy explained that the trial would be heard before the Bavarian *Volksgerichte* (People’s Courts). These courts had been formed after the failed Soviet Republic in Bavaria to try those accused of political crimes, like treason, and other crimes in Bavaria. There was no provision for a jury trial; rather, cases were heard by five judges, two professional and three lay. The situation favored Hitler and the Nazis as they would be facing a court system more favorable to their ideas than if they had been tried within the federal court system.

Despite reporting that the case would be heard in Bavaria, U.S. officials spent little time analyzing why a Bavarian court would adjudicate a case involving an attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic. The lack of analysis is even more unusual as the circumstances stemmed from the ongoing power struggle between Bavaria and the federal government that had concerned the United States since the creation of the Weimar Republic. In 1921 and 1922, the German government felt the *Volksgerichte* handed out sentences to left-wing revolutionaries that were too harsh as the courts became more

5 The Hitler-Ludendorff Trial, 11 March 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5259, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

6 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


8 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.
reactionary in turbulent Bavaria. Yet prior to the Beer Hall Putsch, the government did not “feel strong enough to insist upon the abolition of these courts.”

The failed coup presented the still weak Weimar Republic with an opportunity to improve its relationship with Bavaria by conceding jurisdiction for the putsch trial to the Bavarian government. In return, the Bavarian government agreed to close down all of the Volksgerichte in March 1924, except for the one in Munich, which would close after the prosecution of the conspirators. Additionally, all future cases involving political crimes would be tried by the German Supreme Court.

Rather than fully evaluating this turn of events, U.S. officials focused on Bavaria’s plans for the trial. They reported that Bavaria hoped to resolve the situation as quickly as possible, even to the extent of preferring not to have a trial. Ambassador Houghton contended that “it is doubtful, as a matter of fact, if the trial would ever have been held at all had it not been for the aggressive attitude of the defendants, as the Bavarian Government clearly recognized the embarrassment which would inevitably result if the evidence against itself was revealed.”

Many officials had been participants in the coup, both willing and unwilling, and the government feared that trial testimony would reflect poorly on it. Additionally, Bavarian officials were concerned that the Nazis would use the forum to gain more adherents. Not having a trial, however, would have

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11 Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
opened the door for the Weimar government to prosecute the conspirators, which would have further embarrassed the Bavarian government. Bavarian officials were determined to keep control of the proceedings and ensure that they did not come under fire for allowing the environment to develop in which the National Socialists had flourished.12

The initial compromise between Bavaria and the Weimar Republic seemed to pave the way for further improvements to the tense relationship. When the opportunity to resolve other state-federal conflicts presented itself, Bavaria actually postponed the trial of the conspirators.13 The two sides had to work quickly to make compromises as the earlier agreement required the Munich court to close 1 April; therefore, if the trial had not concluded by that date, it would be transferred to the Supreme Court.14 Two ongoing issues of contention between Bavaria and the Weimar Republic would be resolved in February 1924.15 The first involved conflict over the role of the Reichswehr in Bavaria as the German government believed that it did not have sufficient control of the military forces there. General Otto von Lossow, the commander of the Reichswehr in the region and frequent right-wing agitator, had been approached by Hitler during the Beer Hall

12 Jablonsky, The Nazi Party in Dissolution, 66.

13 Alanson B. Houghton tel to Secretary of State, 16 February 1924, 862.00/1401, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


15 General Hans von Seeckt, who commanded the Reichswehr, did inform Ambassador Houghton “that difficulties between Reich and Bavaria would shortly be iron out.” Houghton tel to State, 16 February 1924, 863.00/1401.
Putsch and there remained some confusion about the role he played. The Bavarian government successfully encouraged him to retire to allow the assertion of federal control over the Reichswehr. In return, the Weimar Republic agreed to consult with Bavaria prior to “appointing or dismissing the commander of the Bavarian Division of the national army.” The government also agreed to factor in “Bavarian interests” if federal troops were deployed within Bavaria. Finally, members of the Reichswehr in Bavaria, while being required to assert allegiance to the central government, would also be permitted to state “a separate oath of allegiance to the state government.”

A second issue involved the resignation of long-time Bavarian official Gustav von Kahr. Minister President Eugen von Knilling appointed Kahr to the position of general state commissioner of Bavaria in September 1923 and gave him “full governmental power,” including “dictatorial powers in security matters.” Kahr had spent time prior to the coup organizing many of the right-wing elements agitating in Bavaria. During the coup, Hitler approached Kahr and other Bavarian officials for their support, and initially, the Nazi leader believed he had obtained it. While Kahr later denied supporting Hitler,


17 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 21 February 1924, 862.00/1429, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


19 Murphy to State, 21 February 1924, 862.00/1429.

20 Jablonsky, The Nazi Party in Dissolution, 22.
it was not clear whether he had been involved in the coup or not. And as the state commissioner, Kahr controlled Bavaria’s court system and the prosecuting attorney’s office. Murphy reported that Kahr faced two dangers. On one hand, he was under “public suspicion as a participant in the Hitler-Ludendorff affair;” on the other, he faced “personal danger in that if he resigns he is certain to become the subject of retaliation by his old friends now in the opposition Hitler-Ludendorff camp who feel themselves betrayed.”

Regardless of his possible involvement in the coup, Kahr remained the state commissioner in 1924, which meant that he was “not required to submit to investigation of his connection with the affair,” a fact that presented a conflict that the Bavarian and German governments wished to resolve. U.S. observers reported that Kahr had no desire to give up his position as he “outwardly appears to retain a tenacious grip on local political reins and is waging a stubborn fight against increasing opposition and ridicule.” Despite rumors that Kahr would resign prior to the trial, Murphy believed that he would remain in office unless “disclosures definitely proving his guilt as a participant in the treasonable attempt are made during the proceedings.”

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21 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 11 February 1924, 862.00/1420, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

22 Murphy used the Greek myth of Scylla and Charybdis to explain Kahr’s situation. Murphy to State, 11 February 1924, 862.00/1420.

23 Murphy to State, 11 February 1924, 862.00/1420.

24 Murphy to State, 11 February 1924, 862.00/1420.

25 Murphy to State, 11 February 1924, 862.00/1420.
however, misjudged the situation, as Kahr resigned before the proceedings began in February 1924, unable to overcome opposition to his rule. The Weimar Republic seemed to defer to Bavaria in both the Reichswehr compromise and the resolution of the Kahr situation; thus positioning Bavaria in a much more authoritative position when it came to holding the trial of the putsch participants. And the fact that Gustav von Kahr and Otto von Lossow no longer held prominent positions was significant as they would both be called as witnesses in the putsch trial.

Once these compromises had been reached, Bavarian officials turned to the trial. In particular, they expressed concern regarding how it would affect Adolf Hitler’s popularity, believing that “a trial meant publicity and this in turn meant more attention for Hitler.” While American officials were cognizant of the Bavarian government’s unease regarding the trial, they did not seem to fully understand that even the Bavarian government believed that Hitler remained popular and could use the trial to his advantage. Robert Murphy generally reported that the Bavarian government had been apprehensive about any “disorder” that the trial might cause. Yet, early American accounts fail to reflect any understanding that despite the failed coup, Hitler remained a popular figure in Bavaria. Nor did U.S. observers evaluate the potential ramifications should the trial go poorly for the state.

26 It should be noted that Kahr did not resign from all of his positions; he continued to serve as the president of the District Government of Upper Bavaria. Murphy to State, 21 February 1924, 862.00/1429.

27 Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.


29 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.
Due to its nervousness, the Bavarian government moved swiftly to iron out pre-trial matters. Again, American reports tended to focus on conveying a general summary of the events, not an analysis of the underlying motivations of the Bavarian government or the ramifications for Germany or for American-German relations. Due to concern that testimony would reflect poorly on members of the Bavarian government, the state’s attorney initially desired to keep all proceedings secret, a move, not surprisingly, that the defense opposed.\textsuperscript{30} Illustrating the power of the reactionary movement in Bavaria, the eventual negotiated settlement allowed the defendants “full opportunity to state their side of the case and offer evidence in rebuttal of the charges.” Testimony the court “considered dangerous to the state from the standpoint of foreign politics,” however, would be kept secret.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus, even before the trial began, the situation in Bavaria greatly affected the proceedings. American officials failed to realize that the compromises with both the federal government and the defendants themselves illustrated the continued power of the reactionary right in Bavaria. Even many Germans expressed apprehension, particularly regarding the trial. U.S. military intelligence pointed out that many in the Democratic and Socialist press opposed the leeway given to the defense and felt that the court had been “extremely lax.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.

\textsuperscript{31} Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.

\textsuperscript{32} The Hitler-Ludendorff Trial, 11 March 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5259.
Once the trial began in late February 1924, most of the American coverage fell to Munich-based Robert Murphy and Ambassador Houghton in Berlin. In fact, Houghton had ordered the vice consul to attend.\textsuperscript{33} To a large degree, they provided the details of the testimony and an overall summary analysis of the proceedings. Murphy’s coverage starts with the basics: those indicted; the structure of the court; and then a summary of the indictment.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the overall lack of concern regarding the trial, State Department officials deemed coverage of it significant enough that the initial dispatch sent during the trial numbered over fifty pages.\textsuperscript{35} The focus of the initial reporting was to provide the basics of the events. Houghton pointed out that the court allowed the defendants to “outline their political views and to give an account of their connection to the plot.”\textsuperscript{36} 

The trial opened 26 February 1924 with all but one of the defendants being charged “with the collective commission of the crime of high treason.”\textsuperscript{37} For a month, the court heard the testimony of the defendants and witnesses, starting with Hitler. In his testimony, Hitler made it clear that he had been drawn to Munich due to the November 1918 revolution, as he felt that “the Marxist question is the basic problem of the German nation. Insofar as it places the many before the individual, mass before energy, the

\textsuperscript{33} Jeffrey J. Matthews, \textit{Alanson B. Houghton: Ambassador of the New Era} (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2004), 98.

\textsuperscript{34} Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.

\textsuperscript{35} Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.

\textsuperscript{36} Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich}, vol. 1, trans. H. Francis Freniere, Lucie Karcic, Philip Fandek (Arlington, VA: University Publications of America, Inc., 1976), 26
Marxist movement undermines the very foundations of civilization.”  

Hitler believed that Germany as a whole could fall to these forces. Thus, he argued that the National Socialist “movement was not founded to garner seats in parliament and collect dues; we founded our movement to apply ourselves to the fate of Germany in her eleventh-hour struggle.”  

After fully admitting to his role in and leadership of the putsch, Hitler claimed that while he was responsible, he could not “plead guilty” as “there can be no ‘high treason’ against the traitors of 1918.”

U.S. observers dutifully reported the details of the trial as soon as it began. In their initial analysis, Murphy and Houghton disagreed on the significance of the testimony of the defendants. Murphy downplayed the significance of Adolf Hitler while Houghton continued to see Adolf Hitler as a pivotal figure. According to Murphy, the testimony of Hitler contained “much unimportant matter.” Murphy focused on Hitler’s views of the National Socialist movement and its purpose in Bavaria and throughout Germany as a whole. He summarized Hitler’s testimony by writing that Hitler came upon “the idea to lead a popular movement for the reconstruction of Germany” to “save the German people” while he recovered from his World War I injuries. Murphy then contended that Hitler’s stated goal was “to depose the central Government in its present international parliamentarian composition and replace it with a nationalist absolutely anti-

38 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 49.
39 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 53.
40 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 71.
41 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.
parliamentarian government, a dictatorship.”

Houghton seemed to grant Hitler more consideration. He believed that “the speech of Hitler in his own defense showed him to be a popular orator, skilled at playing upon the emotions of a not especially intelligent audience.”

Despite that belief, Hitler’s testimony did not seem to elicit any concern on the part of American policymakers. Even though both Murphy and U.S. intelligence reported that Hitler took responsibility for the coup, neither examined the significance of Hitler’s testimony. For the most part, they just conveyed Hitler’s argument; although Murphy pointed out that “few questions were asked by the court and prosecuting attorney.”

What their coverage illustrated was the consistency of Hitler’s beliefs and his skill at taking responsibility while at the same time continuing his criticism of the government of Germany.

A bit of dissonance is present in the American coverage of the defendants’ testimony when it came to General Erich Ludendorff. Ludendorff was a World War I hero and had cultivated a nationalist following in post-World War I Bavaria through the publication of writings “about the world conspiracies of the Jews, Catholics and Freemasons.” Prior to the putsch, he had begun attending Nazi rallies. During the putsch attempt, he had literally stood side-by-side with Hitler in the streets of Munich.

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42 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.

43 Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.

44 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440; The Hitler-Ludendorff Trial, 11 March 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5259.

45 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440

46 Jablonsky, The Nazi Party in Dissolution, 14.
Erich Ludendorff also testified at trial to his involvement in the nationalist movement and expressed the belief that its purpose was “to make the German man, the German Fatherland, and all the German people strong and free.” Ludendorff viewed Hitler as “a selfless man.” He also stressed that Hitler had not coerced his participation, stating, “I was not acting by virtue of Hitler’s command; but from my own strength.” Robert Murphy placed a great deal of significance on Ludendorff’s testimony. Murphy detailed Ludendorff’s testimony, including the former war hero’s reasons for supporting Hitler, which included the anti-Semitic foundations to the movement. Murphy concluded by insisting that Ludendorff “stands out as a central figure in the plotting and agitation to overthrow the present German Government.” Ambassador Houghton disagreed, asserting that Ludendorff “displayed himself to be entirely without originality as a political thinker.”

American analysts believed that the downfall of the coup participants stemmed from their inability to comprehend Germany’s true problems. Murphy maintained that the leaders of the putsch shared in the “primitiveness of their political thought.” They felt that “the guilt for Germany’s misfortunes lay with the November criminals of 1918,

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47 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 234.
48 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 234.
49 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 1, 253.
50 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.
51 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.
52 Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.
Social Democrats, Jews and Free Masons. These must first be annihilated.” Once that had been achieved, a unified and pure Germany could commence “the battle for the freedom of the country from its foreign enemies.” Murphy proposed that “this naïve conception seems to be built on patriotism and a failure to understand realities.”

So instead of being concerned about where the trial was being held, what its structure was, and how much leeway was provided to the defendants, Murphy used the trial to reaffirm preconceived American beliefs. In the process, U.S. officials dismissed the power of the testimony, particularly Hitler’s.

In the end, the court found four defendants, including Hitler, guilty of high treason. All were sentenced to five years in prison, minus time served, plus a fine. And all were eligible for parole after six months. The court found five other participants guilty of “the crime of abetment to the crime of high treason” and they were sentenced to fifteen months, minus time served, plus a fine. These five defendants would serve the remainder of their sentences on parole. Ludendorff was acquitted. In its “Justification of the Verdict,” the court provided its official account of the events leading to the Beer Hall Putsch and the role played by the defendants. In describing the reasoning behind the sentencing, the judges ruled that “the motives of the defendants were genuinely

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53 Murphy to State, 6 March 1924, 862.00/1440.


55 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 3, 368-96.
patriotic, noble and selfless.” They also “decided to grant extenuating circumstances to the defendants.” The court contended that for those convicted of high treason, “the minimum sentence of five-years’ imprisonment—the term prescribed by a rather severe law—is sufficient punishment for their crime.” Additionally, Hitler’s situation merited further consideration. Under Article 9, paragraph II of the Law for the Protection of the Republic, “foreigners are to be expelled from the territory of the Reich” when committing high treason or other crimes against the republic. Yet the court found it “both meaningless and without purpose to apply the provision” to Hitler because in addition to his wartime service in the German Army, “Hitler is German-Austrian. He considers himself to be a German. He is a man who thinks and feels as a German.” Ludendorff’s acquittal stemmed from the court’s belief that he was a passive participant and did not truly understand Hitler’s motives for attempting to create a national dictatorship.

At the trial’s end, U.S. observers provided synopses of the ruling and analyses of the verdicts. U.S. military intelligence boiled the verdict down succinctly, relaying that “Ludendorff was acquitted (as expected) and Hitler and his associates were given mild

56 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 3, 393.
57 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 3, 395.
58 Johannes Mattern, Bavaria and the Reich: The Conflict over the Law for the Protection of the Republic (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 98. The entire Law is included as Appendix I.
59 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 3, 368-95. This action by the court could have been punished under additional provisions of the Law for the Protection of the Republic. Article 9, paragraph II, stated, “Contraventions against these provisions will be punished with imprisonment.” Thus, by issuing a ruling contrary to the required punishment, the judges faced imprisonment by the Weimar Republic. However, the federal government did not enforce the provision. Mattern, Bavaria and the Reich, 98.
60 The Hitler Trial before the People’s Court in Munich, vol. 3, 391-93.
sentences, which will amount to a few weeks confinement to a fortress and about a $20 fine.” Officials, however, did note German disagreement over the results, asserting that “the rights [sic] hailed this as a victory but the center and left were bitter in their denunciations of the sentences and acquittal.” 61 Robert Murphy felt that “the court dwelt upon the patriotic though misguided intentions of the defendants” and supported the verdict, asserting that it “proves that complete sense of reason has not been lost by the conservative element which is really representative of Bavaria.” But at the same time, Murphy pointed out that the “lenient, almost sympathetic tribunal to the insolence of the self-styled saviours [sic] of the German fatherland” allowed a great deal of “latitude” in the trial. 62

The American reaction to the post-trial status of the reactionary movement reflected that some disagreement existed among U.S. observers. Even during the trial, Ambassador Houghton drew the conclusion “that the reactionary movement in Germany has suffered a great reverse as the result of the failure of this plot.” 63 Robert Murphy’s analysis of the results exhibited a deeper understanding of the situation in Bavaria. He contended that there was a “disease in the body politic” when it came to “patriotic or nationalist societies” in Bavaria. The putsch itself was a “farcical [sic] failure.” But

61 Summary of Politics for April 1924, 6 May 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5449, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

62 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 3 April 1924, 862.00/1469, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

63 Houghton to State, 3 March 1924, 862.00/1434.
Murphy was quick to add that the reactionary movement had not ended in Bavaria; rather, “it has simply been delayed.” Murphy understood that the unresolved issue in Bavaria remained the dissatisfaction with the “November criminals,” the Germans who ended World War I in November 1918. As the putsch illustrated, “the foundations of this ‘volkisch’ or nationalist movement is not peaceable, constitutional means, but force of arms and military dictatorship.” Unlike Houghton, Murphy did not see this as an end to the reactionary movement as the “youngbloods and hotheads” were “as recalcitrant as ever.”

Truman Smith agreed that the völkisch movement, while virulent and illogical, was “a factor in German politics.”

In the months following the trial, U.S. diplomats failed to fully perceive the significance of Adolf Hitler’s actions after his conviction and the reluctance of Bavarian officials to deal with him permanently. They relayed, for example, Hitler’s announcement that he would not participate in political activity while in prison and that no visitors should come to see him as he would be writing a book. Another report announced that Hitler had officially resigned his leadership of the Nazis. But American officials failed to understand the significance of these actions. As Hitler planned his next

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64 Murphy to State, 3 April 1924, 862.00/1469.

65 Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert, 74.

66 James M. Bowcock to Secretary of State, 12 July 1924, 862.00/1568, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

67 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 14 July 1924, 862.00/1567, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
moves, Robert Murphy speculated that “it is contemplated that upon completion of his term, Hitler, who is not a citizen will be expelled from the country. Further nationalist activity on his part would, for the present at least appear to be excluded.” By law, Hitler should have been expelled immediately, but the Bavarian judges had spared him that punishment. Bavaria also persisted in being the home of a visible reactionary movement. Murphy, in other words, failed to understand the popularity of the movement and also misjudged the perseverance of Adolf Hitler.

Assistant military attaché Truman Smith had a slightly different take on the trial’s impact on Adolf Hitler. Much like Murphy, Smith believed that the putsch could have been the end of Hitler because “only a miracle could save him.” But Smith saw the trial as that miracle, because as “absurd as his putsch was, the policy of the Bavarian government at the trial of the ringleaders was doubly farcical.” The assistant military attaché believed that Hitler and the Nazis were “a potential if not immediate danger to the German republic.”

But the U.S. government did not perform a thorough evaluation of the state of the National Socialist movement choosing to believe the threat had been destroyed.

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68 Murphy to State, 3 April 1924, 862.00/1469.

69 In his 1964 autobiography, Murphy acknowledged, “I found it impossible to believe that the demagogue Hitler, so unconvincing to me, would ever amount to much.” Robert Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 13.

70 Robert Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert: the Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), 73. Because Smith’s article on the subject remained unpublished in 1924, few were able to read his views. For the entire article, “The German ‘Fascisti,’” see Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert, 67-74.

71 Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert, 68.
disagreement between Murphy and Smith failed to spur any further discussion of the movement in Washington or even among the American officials in Germany. The prevailing assumption seemed to be that any group engaging in such a poorly conceived and executed putsch would not be able to recover.

III

American observers were not just concerned with the putsch trial; they also continued to monitor the overall economic and political situation in Germany, convinced that a stable Germany was essential for good German-American relations. Economically, the focus remained on the reparations and Ruhr issues that had been problematic for years. Politically, the United States scrutinized the major political parties and the coalition governments formed in Germany from 1924 through 1925.

Economic issues continued to be in the forefront of the Weimar Republic’s troubles, and the United States remained concerned. Ambassador Houghton had been encouraging action almost since his arrival in April 1922 as he believed that a financial collapse “would threaten the very existence of the nascent democracy.” While the State Department agreed, it had been slow to act due to congressional opposition to international involvement.72 As conditions in Germany worsened, Houghton continued his campaign to spur the government to increased involvement, including taking his case directly to Washington while on leave in May 1923. By the end of his visit, the

72 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 62.
ambassador’s pessimistic outlook had begun to influence the State Department, although Houghton remained aggravated with just how conservative the Harding administration’s foreign policy approach had been.\textsuperscript{73}

In late 1923, Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes made it clear “that the European problem is of direct and vital interest to the United States.” While the American government was willing to become involved in the reparations discussion, it could only conference in an “advisory” capacity.\textsuperscript{74} After the Europeans accepted the situation, U.S. financiers went to work on recommendations.\textsuperscript{75} The meetings to develop what became known as the Dawes Plan began in January and ended in early April 1924. The experts put together a plan that “did not set a fixed reparations sum but laid out an initially ascending payment schedule” and “called for an international loan” secured by the German railway system to stabilize the country’s economy.\textsuperscript{76}

Notwithstanding American efforts, German support for the plan was not a foregone conclusion. U.S. military intelligence noted that while the German government looked positively on the plan, believing that it “offer[ed] a practical basis for the solution of the reparations problem,” not all agreed as “the right wing is bitter in its denunciation of the government for the accepting in principle of the experts’ plan” because it

\textsuperscript{73} Matthews, \textit{Alanson B. Houghton}, 79-82.


\textsuperscript{75} Margot Louria, \textit{Triumph and Downfall: America’s Pursuit of Peace and Prosperity, 1921-1933} (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001), 73.

\textsuperscript{76} Manfred Jonas, \textit{The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 176.
legitimized the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, the reactionary movement registered its discontentment even before the official announcement of the plan, claiming it represented a “‘second Versailles.’” Because the United States hoped to stabilize Europe, the acceptance of the plan was vital. Consequently, Ambassador Houghton worked closely with Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann to ensure German acceptance.

As the German government struggled to gain acceptance of the plan, American observers made sure to closely analyze the workings of the German government. Soon after the conclusion of the putsch trial, Germany held elections for the Reichstag. From 1920 to 1924, elections throughout Germany had resulted in a political trend away from the moderate center to the ends of the political spectrum on the right and left. Concerned American observers closely followed the April campaigns for the 4 May elections. U.S. military intelligence found that the general feeling in Germany was that the extreme ends of the right and left would gain seats. Wilhelm Marx, the chancellor since November 1923, and his coalition cabinet supported the Dawes Plan. A shift in the

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77 Summary of Politics for April 1924, 6 May 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5449.

78 Jonas, The United States and Germany, 177.

79 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 99-100.

80 These were long-scheduled elections as the four-year term of the Reichstag, which had been elected in 1920, was set to expire. Walter James Shepard, “The German Elections,” The American Political Science Review 18 (Aug., 1924): 528.

81 Summary of Politics for April 1924, 6 May 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #5449.
Reichstag to the right or left could lead to a decrease in support for the plan. Additionally, the campaigns showed growing interest in returning the monarchy to Germany. 82 The United States did not support either potential development.

The election results did indeed confirm “a still further swing both to the right and to the left.” The surprising gains of the Communists, who quadrupled their seats in the Reichstag, did not alarm U.S. officials. 83 The parties on the right did not do as well they hoped, only securing about 20 percent of the seats. While clearly not a majority, the right wing’s minimal success did concern the United States. Alanson Houghton warned that “the nationalists and the Voelkische parties are undoubtedly out for trouble. They want a parliamentary breakdown.” 84 And this affected the formation of a new Marx cabinet as the election results had “seriously weakened the moderate republican coalition.” 85 Houghton ruminated on the potential problems in forming a working coalition of political parties as there was disagreement over acceptance of the Dawes Plan among parties on the right. In particular, he worried about the ability of the Germans to form a coalition that would support the plan, contending that “the capacity of German politicians to do the wrong thing is beyond belief.” 86 In this climate, Wilhelm Marx, a leader of the Catholic


83 Communist gains came at the expense of the Socialists, so while they gained seats, it did not correspond to a larger left-wing movement. Shepard, “The German Elections,” 531.

84 Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State, 8 May 1924, 862.00/1989, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


86 Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State, 8 May 1924, 862.00/1989.
Center party, tried, but failed, to form a coalition with the conservative nationalistic parties. In June, Friedrich Ebert, the president of Germany, allowed Marx to form a minority coalition.\(^87\) Despite not having the majority of seats, the new government survived a vote of confidence in the Reichstag days later.\(^88\)

Even with the formation of the coalition, the problems in Germany remained constant. In order to ensure German agreement to the Dawes Plan, Houghton met secretly with members of the government and made clear that “the conservatives had to cooperate or the United States would completely abandon Germany.”\(^89\) Finally in August 1924, with Stresemann stressing the importance of cooperation with the United States, the Reichstag approved the plan.\(^90\) Once this occurred, the United States took on a direct economic role in Germany and Europe as a whole.\(^91\) This shift aligned with the foreign policy approach of the Republican administrations of the 1920s in its emphasis “on aiding in the economic rehabilitation” in Europe.\(^92\)

This new economic role put the United States in the center of things as the issue of reparations continued to affect the political development of Germany. U.S. military

\(^87\) Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 100.


\(^89\) Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 105.

\(^90\) Jonas, The United States and Germany, 180.

\(^91\) Jonas, The United States and Germany, 181.

intelligence reported that from reparations “emanate all the large questions of the day completely overshadowing generally normal issues.” In their view, all political parties based “their policies, aims, and election promises” on how they felt regarding the reparations issue.93

Despite this progress, the Marx government coalition struggled without having a majority in the Reichstag. In September, Marx began trying to create a new coalition, but it proved so difficult that he requested the dismissal of the Reichstag in October. President Ebert agreed and scheduled elections for 7 December.94 The United States closely followed the campaigning and its focus remained on the right-wing parties. The U.S. commercial attaché C. E. Herring contended that the election “will be of the utmost importance, as it will constitute an acid test of nationalist strength.”95 The elections led to “losses for both the extremes” due in part to a better economic environment.96 U.S. military intelligence quickly pointed out that parties on the right and left had weakened even more than anticipated since the May elections. The German Communist Party lost 17 seats to come in at 45. The Völkische Bloc dropped from 32 to 14 seats, which prompted U.S. military intelligence to note that “the Fascisti suffered a smashing defeat,

93 Political Estimate, 22 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #6088, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


95 C. E. Herring, “Weekly Report,” 27 October 1924, enclosure to Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 4 November 1924, 862.00/1736, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

though Ludendorff was elected." Ludendorff had run for the German Völkisch Freedom Party. Regardless of the losses of the extreme parties, the overall party composition of the Reichstag remained relatively unchanged. Thus, the Marx government remained in turmoil after the December elections.

The United States wanted to ensure that it had a clear understanding of political developments as Republican foreign policy linked economic turmoil to potential “political instability,” which would hinder American interests. Accordingly, U.S. military intelligence provided an analysis of the aims, strength, and leadership of the nine most significant political parties in Germany and the number of seats they would hold in the Reichstag when it opened on 5 January 1925. Once again, there were problems developing a working coalition when the legislative body reconvened. According to Houghton, it looked like Hans Luther, who had no political affiliation, would become the chancellor, but the ambassador cautioned that while the new cabinet might seem “non-partisan in name [it] would undoubtedly be influenced to a considerable degree by

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97 The Reichstag Election of December 7, 1924, 9 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #6038, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

98 The official name of the party was the Deutschvölkischer Freiheitspartei. In his dispatch, Murphy translated the name as the German Nationalist Emancipation Party. Illustrating the link to National Socialism though, he contended that this party name was “additional terminology” for the NSDAP. Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 4 April 1924, 862.00/1470, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


101 Political Estimate, 22 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #6088.
Nationalists and would therefore incur the determined opposition of Democrats and Socialists.”

Luther formed a government in mid-January. While the Völkische Bloc did not join Luther’s coalition, the new cabinet itself signified “a strong shift to the right.” American policymakers seemed relieved that the extreme right remained outsiders. Houghton asserted that “while cabinet undoubtedly represents a movement toward the right no question of monarchial intrigues is involved in its formation.” He also believed that the new government put the Dawes Plan in a better position as it included the Nationalist Party’s “moderate wing” rather than the radical faction, which railed against the plan. C. E. Herring supported Houghton’s general impression about the Luther coalition. He also critiqued the German political system, insisting that the multiplicity of parties meant that there seemed to be “little chance” to develop a “consistent majority.” Herring also considered the initial actions of the Luther government positive, despite its precarious position.

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102 Alanson B. Houghton tel to Secretary of State, 11 January 1925, 862.00/1740, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


104 Alanson B. Houghton tel to Secretary of State, 16 January 1925, 862.00/1748, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


The month after Luther secured his cabinet, President Ebert died. Many American officials felt this led to some complications as Ebert had done his best to stabilize Germany without increasing its problems. U.S. policymakers understood that Ebert had managed to work with all the major German parties with the exception of the communists. It should be noted, however, that the reactionary right did not always get along with Ebert. His death meant that Germany’s first popular presidential election needed to be held.

In early March, the Reichstag scheduled the first presidential election for 29 March and the second, for a potential run-off, for 26 April. Even before the elections had been scheduled, party leaders worked to select their candidates. American officials monitored the parties’ maneuvering as they attempted to work together to support candidates. The “bloc of the right” initially tried to support a mutual candidate but failed to come to an agreement. The same held true for the bourgeois parties. The eventual list of seven presidential candidates illustrated the lack of collaboration among the major

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109 Ebert had been chosen by the constitutional assembly, not elected by the German people. Andreas Dorpalen, Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 36.


111 Matthew E. Hanna to Secretary of State, 19 March 1925, 862.00/1828, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
political parties, as only one, Karl Jarres, had the backing of more than one.\footnote{For the parties’ attempts to collaborate, see Draper, “The German Presidential Election,” 593-95.} The Völkische Bloc split its support, with Northerners supporting the conservative candidate Karl Jarres while South Germans backed Erich Ludendorff.\footnote{Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 24 March 1925, 862.00/1831, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} When the votes were tallied the votes, Jarres had the most, but fell short by three million of achieving the necessary majority. These results were not unexpected. As C. E. Herring noted, everything set up a showdown between the right bloc and the middle parties.\footnote{Enclosure to Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, C.E. Herring report, “Outstanding Features,” 4 April 1925, 862.00/1854, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} This meant that a run-off would be held on 26 April 1925. But Warren D. Robbins, the chargé d’affaires ad interim, pointed out that in the second election, the winner only needed to achieve the most votes, rather than a majority, as well as the strange situation that not only was the run-off not just between the two highest vote-getters, but the parties were not even required to run the same candidates.\footnote{Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 1 April 1925, 862.00/1844, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.}

As the second election approached, the United States monitored the arrangements being made by the various parties, particularly their choice of presidential candidates. Notwithstanding the fact that Jarres had garnered the most votes in March, his selection
as a candidate remained uncertain. The other candidate with right-wing support, Ludendorff, had failed miserably in the first round of voting. U.S. officials noted that as the election approached, the Völkische Bloc had begun moving away from Jarres as a candidate. Despite being the highest vote getter in the election, he had disappointed the coalition of parties that had supported him. Hoping to run a more popular figure, they tried to convince a reluctant Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg to be their candidate. Robbins believed that the election would come down to whoever served as the candidate of the right and the former chancellor, Wilhelm Marx, who had the support of multiple parties.

The disappointment with Karl Jarres’s showing and the political maneuvering that followed did indeed result in an election pitting a new candidate of the right, Paul von Hindenburg, against Wilhelm Marx. Houghton reported in April that due to the influence of the Bavarian People’s Party, the right bloc had decided on Hindenburg and had finally convinced him to run. The Catholic Center Party, the Democrats, and the Socialists backed Marx, in what was called the People’s Bloc. While the communist Ernst

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116 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 7 April 1925, 862.00/1845, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

117 Of the seven candidates, Ludendorff had finished last. Robbins to State, 1 April 1925, 862.00/1844.

118 Robbins to State, 7 April 1925, 862.00/1845.


120 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 7 April 1925, 862.00/1845.

121 Warren D. Robbins tel to Secretary of State, 9 April 1925, 862.00/1841, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Thälmann was also running, Robbins believed the real race pitted Marx versus Hindenburg or “Monarchy versus Republic.” The American chargé d’affaires ad interim felt that Marx could tally at least one million more votes than Hindenburg.122 Hindenburg himself did not campaign much, but other politicians of the right made the case for him.123 Robbins found the push for Hindenburg “surprising” but continued to believe that Marx would win the election.124 Houghton also felt confident Marx would win, but still worried that the election of war hero Hindenburg would call into question the German commitment to peace.125 U.S. observers noted that opponents to Hindenburg claimed that his election would lead to American economic sanctions.126 Despite American predictions otherwise, Hindenburg won the presidential election by almost a million votes.127 In one telegram, Robbins credited his victory to “the women’s vote”

122 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 14 April 1925, 832.00/1873, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

123 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 20 April 1925, 862.00/1880, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

124 Warren D. Robbins tel to Secretary of State, 25 April 1925, 862.00/1862, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

125 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 120.

126 Robbins tel to State, 25 April 1925, 862.00/1862; Enclosure to Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, C.E. Herring report, “Outstanding Features,” 27 April 1925, 862.00/1912, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

127 Draper, “The German Presidential Election,” 599.
and the “sentimental and so-called patriot voters.” In another, he claimed it “was due to the symbolism for which his name stands, namely as a patriot and loyal soldier of Germany.” Even after he had time to further reflect on the vote, Robbins contended that female voters, sentimental feelings, and Hindenburg’s “name and personality” led to his election. This turn of events seemed to reflect a shift in Germany to the right.

IV

A tumultuous situation existed in Bavaria. First, the relationship between Bavaria and the Weimar Republic continued to be tenuous even after the compromises made prior to the trial of the putsch participants. Bavaria still desired to maintain as much local control as possible. Second, the political situation was a bit shaky after the failed putsch. Third, Bavaria had to deal with the continual agitation of former adherents to National Socialism and the reappearance of Adolf Hitler on the scene.

The conflict over unitary control persistently affected Bavarian-German relations. Prior to the putsch trial, a campaign began in Bavaria to revise the German constitution. In January 1924, the Bavarian government presented a nineteen page document to the

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128 Warren D. Robbins tel to Secretary of State, 28 April 1925, 862.00/1865, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

129 Warren D. Robbins tel to Secretary of State, 28 April 1925, 862.00/1866, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

130 Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 30 April 1925, 862.00/1907, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
chancellor outlining the Bavarian concerns with the constitution and their proposed reforms. The reforms emphasized the need for states’ rights, particularly in matters of joint interest between the federal and local governments.\textsuperscript{131} Robert Murphy contended that while this illustrated a problem between the federal government and Bavaria, it also showed that the threat of separatism in Bavaria had been overblown; that “decentralization” was the real goal.\textsuperscript{132} Yet he also conveyed that “a constitutional monarchy would be acceptable to the Bavarian population.”\textsuperscript{133} Despite the compromises prior to the Beer Hall Putsch that seemed to favor Bavaria, after the trial itself, U.S. officials seemed to believe that Bavaria was on the losing end of this round of its struggle with the national government. Murphy contended that Bavaria had “sunken to a mere province within the frame of a centralized government created by the Constitution of Weimar.”\textsuperscript{134}

The failed putsch had also put the Bavarian government in turmoil. Bavaria held elections for the Landtag, its legislative assembly, on 6 April 1924. Eugen von Knilling continued to be the minister president, but Murphy speculated that he would be stepping

\textsuperscript{131} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 9 January 1924, 862.00/1394, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{132} Murphy to State, 9 January 1924, 862.00/1394; Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 16 January 1924, 862.00/1397, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{133} Murphy to State, 16 January 1924, 862.00/1397.

\textsuperscript{134} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 22 May 1924, 862.00/1533, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
down as he was not running for re-election in the Landtag. Murphy also examined the potential impact of the newly formed Völkische Bloc on the Landtag elections. He referred to the new political movement as being “virtually the dissolved National Socialist German Workmen’s Party (Hitler’s Old Organization) under another label” and revealed that it “has attracted most of the radical nationalist element” in Bavaria.\footnote{Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 4 April 1924, 862.00/1470.} The day following the election, Robert Murphy sent a “provisional estimate” of what had occurred. Showing its strength, the Völkische Bloc made “its first parliamentary appearance as the third strongest party in the assembly.”\footnote{Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 25 April 1924, 862.00/1503, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.}

While Washington had not expressed direct interest in Bavaria, Ambassador Houghton continued to stay abreast of the developments by requesting Murphy’s analysis of the situation. The Völkische Bloc, “or extreme nationalist movement,” remained a work in progress. Overall, “its organization is loose, and its policies are often inconsistent.” Still, Murphy saw its creation as demonstrating a shift of the reactionary movement “from a non-parliamentary party into a political party with slight gain of prestige and the possibility of a large loss of popularity.” Murphy believed the party’s success in winning 23 of 128 seats in the Landtag resulted from “a destructive campaign of irresponsible criticism of the other parliamentary groups.” Murphy did not see the Völkische Bloc as an upstart party on the rise, though, suggesting that it “must be prepared to take the consequences for almost certain inability to bring about the reforms
and changes it has promised.” He continued, “It is still questionable whether the group will prove itself a practical cooperator and ready to compromise with other parties, or whether it will be purely negative and obstructive. Tendencies in both directions are apparent.” Murphy argued that problems within the party needed to be dealt with and that many of those elected from the party had no parliamentary experience.\footnote{Murphy to State, 22 May 1924, 862.00/1533.} He clearly did not feel that it presented a threat in Bavaria.

After the Bavarian elections, Eugen von Knilling attempted to remain in control, but failed to establish a government. Almost two months after the elections, Heinrich von Held took over the reins as minister president.\footnote{Warren D. Robbins to Secretary of State, 1 July 1924, 862.00/1563, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} The American vice-consul in charge, James M. Bowcock, described Held as “represent[ing] the idea of a strong Bavaria within the frame of Empire: he is not a Separatist, but he is reactionary and a Monarchist standing for a modified Bismarckian form of national constitution.”\footnote{James M. Bowcock to Secretary of State, 10 July 1924, 862.00/1569, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} Thus, the reactionary tendencies of Bavaria remained unbroken.

Many in Bavaria continued their opposition to the Treaty of Versailles and the concept that Germany had to accept war guilt. On the fifth anniversary of the signing of
the treaty a major protest was held in Munich.\textsuperscript{140} The Bavarian Landtag itself delved into the question of war guilt in July 1924, demanding that the lie of war guilt be dealt with by the national government. The Völkische Bloc put forward legislation to teach elementary and secondary students about the war guilt lie and the “disgraceful Treaty of Versailles,” although members of the Landtag rejected the motion.\textsuperscript{141}

At the same time that Ambassador Houghton worked to gain approval for the Dawes Plan at the federal level, Murphy reported that sentiment in Bavaria was decidedly against it. He asserted that while many felt it was a “step in the right direction,” they also felt “the burdens placed upon Germany are far greater than was anticipated.” In particular, the Völkische Bloc, the extreme nationalists, remained opposed to its acceptance and called it a “second Versailles.”\textsuperscript{142}

Because of their differences with the federal government, Bavarians also paid close attention to developments during both the December 1924 Reichstag elections and the 1925 presidential election. The general feeling in Munich was that the Reichstag elections would show “an increased tendency towards the right.” At the same time, though, Murphy argued that the Völkische Bloc in Munich was “disintegrating” despite

\textsuperscript{140} James M. Bowcock to Secretary of State, 3 July 1924, 862.00/1557, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{141} James M. Bowcock to Secretary of State, 22 July 1924, 862.00/1580, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{142} Murphy to State, 22 May 1924, 862.00/1533.
its presence on the national scene.\(^{143}\) The bloc was indeed losing support even as Bavarians voted for their representatives in the Reichstag; out of over 2.8 million voters in Bavaria, just over 100,000 voted for the extreme nationalists. Murphy maintained that the voting illustrated “a decrease in radical sentiment, and a desire to return as quickly as possible to normal political and economic conditions.”\(^{144}\)

Once the Luther government formed, Bavaria found itself pleased with the overall approach of the government and its rightward political shift. Bavarian sentiment improved more when Luther visited Munich and seemed to support “increased sovereignty for the individual German states.”\(^{145}\) In response to a State Department request, Murphy transmitted a translated clipping of Luther’s February speech.\(^{146}\) In the speech, Luther declared that the “political representation of the German people is not only in the Federal Assembly (Reichstag) but in the Reichstag and the parliaments of the various states, limited of course by State constitutions.”\(^{147}\)

\(^{143}\) Murphy said the Völkische bloc was “low in funds” and was disintegrating due to its “extremely radical anti-semitic (sic) propaganda” and its “destructive tendencies…” Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 28 November 1924, 862.00/1715, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{144}\) Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 10 December 1924, 862.00/1726, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{145}\) Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 11 February 1925, 862.00/1797, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{146}\) Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 8 April 1925, 862.00/1855, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{147}\) Translation of the Bayerische Staatszeitung of February 11, 1925, enclosure to Murphy to State, 8 April 1925, 862.00/1855.
As the presidential election geared up for the run-off, the reports out of Bavaria increased. Murphy emphasized that the selection of Marx and Hindenburg had “drawn a clear-cut line of issue in Bavarian politics.” Bavarians believed that Marx stood “for adherence to the republican form of government and a conciliatory foreign policy” while Hindenburg would “constitute a figure head whose personal popularity will form the opening wedge of restoration.” Among voters in Bavaria, Hindenburg garnered over 600,000 more votes than Marx.

For the rest of the year, Bavaria continued to be a home to extremist politics. Murphy made sure to provide a thorough analysis of the situation and listed the main issues of concern for the state: restoration of the monarchy; “modification” of the constitution; “nullification” of the Treaty of Versailles; and a newly added desire, the annexation of Austria. With the exception of annexing Austria, these were the same issues that had been ever-present in Bavarian discourse since the end of the war. These subjects dominated American dispatches from Bavaria for the rest of the year.

148 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 11 April 1925, 862.00/1863, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

149 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 29 April 1925, 862.00/1905, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

150 Enclosure to C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, Robert D. Murphy report “Memorandum for the American Ambassador at Berlin,” 11 August 1925, 862.00/2000, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

151 C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 12 August 1925, 862.00/1991, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 10 September 1925/2025, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives,
The fallout from the putsch and trial made it difficult for American officials to fully track the actions of advocates of National Socialism. Due to the banning of the party in some parts of Germany, there was an attempt to create new groups to carry on. Because the NSDAP could not officially exist, adherents to its ideals were called a variety of names for the next couple of years. As mentioned earlier, the extremist right-wing movement often went by the term Völkische Bloc. In a 1924 report charting the political parties of Germany, U.S. Military Intelligence identified the National Socialists as the “Fascisti or Deutsch-Voelkische Partei (Abbrev. Nat. Soz.)—(Radical Party).” Additionally, U.S. observers often translated party names in different ways. Robert Murphy referred to the German Völkische Freedom Party as the German Nationalist Emancipation Party. Truman Smith suggested that the same party name was best translated as the German Racial Party. American officials also used the phrases

Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 8 October 1925, 862.00/2042, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 10 November 1925, 862.00/2071, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 9 December 1925, 862.00/2105, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 16 December 1925, 862.00/2106, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; C.B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 21 December 1925, 862.00/2114, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

152 Political Estimate, 22 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #6088.

153 Murphy to State, 4 April 1924, 862.00/1470.

extreme nationalists or reactionary nationalists. While Hitler did not participate in the leadership in prison, it was clear that he played an important role regardless of the name used to describe the political movement.

American officials faced a great deal of difficulty in monitoring Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists following the Beer Hall Putsch Trial. As we have seen, Hitler made it clear upon beginning his sentence that he would “refrain from all political activity during his term of detention” and he did not wish supporters to visit as he would be busy writing a book.¹⁵⁵ U.S. analysts did not quite know how to interpret Hitler’s announcement. Since National Socialist adherents had begun working within the electoral system following Hitler’s conviction, they relayed German speculation that Hitler had left his leadership role because he was “opposed to [the party’s] parliamentary activities.”¹⁵⁶

Despite not being able to pin down Hitler and his motivations, American observers continued to scrutinize the efforts of his followers. U.S. observers acknowledged after the party convention in August 1924 that Erich Ludendorff had been taking a more assertive role in the party with Hitler unavailable. In his speech at the opening of the convention, Ludendorff “defended” the entry of the party into parliamentary politics as a necessary action to compete with other movements.¹⁵⁷ Other

¹⁵⁵ Bowcock to State, 12 July 1924, 862.00/1568.

¹⁵⁶ Robbins to State, 14 July 1924, 862.00/1567.

accounts noted that the participants criticized the republican government, the Dawes Plan, and Jewish involvement in Germany. Ludendorff continued his activity, giving a speech against the Dawes Plan at a National Socialist protest meeting in September 1924.

As the time neared for Hitler’s release from prison, there seemed to be some confusion as to what would occur. The first issue involved what would happen to Hitler. Would he be expelled or allowed to stay in Bavaria? What would happen when he was released? Initially, it was believed that Hitler would be expelled. Then, as his release date neared, U.S. officials reported that news out of Bavaria was that Hitler had asked to return to Austria, but then noted that public opinion “seems to be against his repatriation.” Hitler’s release was delayed because the public prosecutor “lodged a complaint with the Supreme Court of Appeal” against the initial court’s decision to grant parole after serving six months. But in late December, the Bavarian government released Hitler. Matthew E. Hanna, first secretary of the embassy, pointed out that the


159 James M. Bowcock to Secretary of State, 6 October 1924, 862.00/1649, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

160 American Embassy, Berlin, “Dr. Held’s Attack on General Ludendorff,” 29 September 1924, 862.00/1627, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

161 American Embassy, Berlin, “Possible return to Austria of Hitler, Bavarian agitator,” 11 November 1924, 862.00/1682, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

162 Bowcock to State, 6 October 1924, 862.00/1649.
participants in the putsch had served much shorter sentences than those involved with the Bavarian Soviet Republic, three of whom were also being released, despite the fact that the two events were “fundamentally alike since in both instances attempts were made to overthrow the legal government by force.”

Prior to Hitler’s release, the Völkische Bloc failed to do well in the December Reichstag elections. This decline was apparent even before the elections as Murphy identified six important parties in Bavaria for the elections. The Völkische Bloc ranked fourth. Murphy believed that the Nazi Party “appears ready to expire.” His observations in Munich had led him to believe that the National Socialists had poor attendance at meetings, high debt, and alienated some with their radical nature. The election results showed a dramatic decrease in support for the Völkische Bloc as it garnered less than a million votes and only got 14 seats in the 493 seat Reichstag. This was quite a drop from the 4 May 1924 elections, when the movement had almost 2 million votes and 32 seats in a 472 seat Reichstag.

Overall, the United States recognized that the right-wing end of the political spectrum lost more than had been expected. U.S. military intelligence contended that

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164 Murphy to State, 28 November 1924, 862.00/1715.

“the Fascisti suffered a smashing defeat.”\textsuperscript{166} And when evaluating the strength of the Nazi Party, the political estimate was that they were “at present weak and unimportant.”\textsuperscript{167} While the extreme right wing had taken losses, overall right-wing parties remained dominant in the Reichstag.\textsuperscript{168} But this meant that just as Hitler left prison, the Völkische Bloc seemed to be taking a step back. U.S. observers reported that it seemed as if the bloc had split into Northern and Southern factions. An embassy account speculated that the North Germans wished to achieve a dictatorship “only by parliamentary activities” while the South German faction eschewed working within the electoral system as “the achievement of their ends will in the future be under the guidance of Hitler.” The report also detailed that the Hitler faction would take back the National Socialist German Workers’ Party name.\textsuperscript{169}

By February 1925, not only had Hitler begun to regain control of the National Socialist movement in Bavaria, but the state had also made it easier for the Nazi leader to organize. Ludendorff officially renounced his leadership of the movement on 12 February. At the same time, the Bavarian government had begun to modify legislation that had established martial law since 1923. Murphy noted that the new provision

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{166} The Reichstag Election of December 7, 1924, 9 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #6038.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Political Estimate, 22 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #6088.
\item \textsuperscript{168} Political Estimate, 22 December 1924, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #6088.
\item \textsuperscript{169} American Embassy, Berlin, “Rupture between North and South German Groups of the Völkische Movement,” 16 February 1925, 862.00/1792, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\end{enumerate}
“discontinues prohibitions against certain political parties namely the Communist Party and the National Socialist Workmen’s Party.” Hitler remained under surveillance, but soon proved able to gain more control of the movement.\textsuperscript{170}

Hitler got to work quickly. Murphy noted that he issued a proclamation on 26 February “announcing the re-organization of the party.”\textsuperscript{171} The \emph{Völkischer Beobachter} published three articles by Hitler outlining his ideas and approach to rebuilding the NSDAP, particularly the need for reconciliation and a new admission process.\textsuperscript{172} In the articles, Hitler addressed the divisions of the movement that had developed during his prison stay. Rather than fight among themselves “in a fratricidal struggle,” he urged believers to convert antinationalists to the movement.\textsuperscript{173} Hitler stressed the need for unity in order that “the entire energy of the movement is to be directed toward the most dreaded enemy of the German people: Judaism and Marxism, as well as their allied or supporting parties, Center and Democrats.”\textsuperscript{174} Truman Smith had given up trying to understand the blame placed on the Jews, declaring “it is probably the task for the

\textsuperscript{170} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 21 February 1925, 862.00/1798, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{171} Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 2 March 1925, 862.00/1810, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{172} Jablonsky, \emph{The Nazi Party in Dissolution}, 167-68.

\textsuperscript{173} Noakes and Pridham, eds., \emph{Nazism, 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader, Vol 1}, 40. See pages 38-40 for translated excerpts of the articles.

\textsuperscript{174} Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, eds., \emph{Inside Hitler’s Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich} (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company), 81.
psychoanalyst and not the political observer to determine why the German people so eagerly grasped at the doctrine that the Jews were the true sources of all of their evils.”

The following day, the Nazis held a meeting at the site of the Beer Hall Putsch. Murphy claimed that 8,000 attended, which he believed showed “the retention of a certain degree of popularity by this liberated demagogue.” The Munich police reported a smaller figure, approximately 5,000 including those outside the hall, but the size of the crowd was large enough that they were forced to close off the street.

Murphy suggested that Hitler successfully tapped into Bavarian sentiment at the meeting, which he claimed “partook of the character of a love-feast.” He also noted that the Nazis had held true to their anti-Semitic beliefs as they had prohibited Jews from attending the meeting.

Hitler’s open leadership of the movement immediately ran into some difficulties. Following the 27 February meeting, Munich authorities began prohibiting meetings at which Hitler was scheduled to speak, charging that he “was bent on provoking violence.” Murphy believed that this move illustrated the Bavarian government’s determination to “do its utmost to prevent a regrowth of National Socialist

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175 Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert, 71.
176 Murphy to State, 2 March 1925, 862.00/1810.
177 Jablonsky, The Nazi Party in Dissolution, 168.
178 Murphy to State, 2 March 1925, 862.00/1810.
179 Jablonsky, The Nazi Party in Dissolution, 168.
disturbances. The Bavarian government did seem to be proactive when in March it banned Hitler from speaking in the state for two years. But Hitler continued to work behind the scenes to rebuild the party. In early April, he urged his supporters to vote for Hindenburg in the upcoming presidential election. And he spent a great deal of time trying to resolve the internal conflicts within the party and the völkisch movement as a whole.

Hitler’s return to the leadership of the NSDAP and his reorganization of the party should have led to an American reevaluation of Hitler and the Nazis. The details included in Murphy’s reports of early 1925 acknowledged that the post-putsch trial analysis of American observers, with the exception of Truman Smith, had been off the mark. Not only had Hitler not been expelled, but he had also reassumed his leadership of the Nazi Party. While it remained unknown how successful Hitler would be, the activity merited a second look at the leader and his party. Yet, no reassessment occurred.

VI

American observers left Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists for dead following the failed Beer Hall Putsch. Most had never believed Hitler to be a legitimate

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180 Robert D. Murphy to Secretary of State, 16 March 1925, 862.00/1821, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


182 Murphy to State, 11 April 1925, 862.00/1863.

183 Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 58-68.
political leader and viewed party members at best as troublemakers. They also believed that the trial and the actions of the Bavarian government would ensure that the man and the movement would never become a political factor in Germany. Yet despite these beliefs, Hitler and the Nazis persevered. And in 1924 and 1925, the NSDAP shifted from a party working outside the electoral system in Bavaria to a growing völkisch movement finding some success in nationwide parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, these actions did not seem to warn U.S. policymakers that a reevaluation should occur. The “disease in the body politic” continued to grow unchecked.

To make matters worse, during Hitler’s rebuilding, new American observers took over positions of vital importance. Truman Smith had left Germany in April 1924. In February 1925, just as Hitler reassumed leadership of the NSDAP, Alanson Houghton left Berlin to take up the post of ambassador to the United Kingdom. Then during the summer of 1925, Robert Murphy left his post in Munich to report to a new position as a consul in Seville, Spain. Houghton, Murphy, and Smith had provided thorough reports and sound analysis during their time in Germany. While doubting the ability of the NSDAP to recover, these U.S. observers had also demonstrated the skill to identify an emerging extremist movement and provide accurate assessments of its foundational tenets, despite the State Department’s lack of interest in much of their reporting. Their

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185 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 110-12.
replacements would soon prove less capable. Before he left, Murphy stressed that “to appreciate the political situation in Bavaria it is really sufficient to keep in mind that the great majority of the population are extremely reactionary.” Nevertheless, once on the job, the new American Ambassador Jacob Gould Schurman forwarded a study of German politics that said of the Völkische Bloc, “their significance seems to be dwindling gradually.” And Charles B. Curtis, the consul general in Munich, immediately began submitting reports that focused more on the general issues in Bavaria rather than the extremist movement. In this environment, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists survived and recovered while American understanding of the situation suffered.


189 Curtis to State, 12 August 1925, 862.00/1991; Curtis to State, 10 September 1925/2025; Curtis to State, 8 October 1925, 862.00/2042; Curtis to State, 10 November 1925, 862.00/2071; Curtis to State, 9 December 1925, 862.00/2105; Curtis to State, 16 December 1925, 862.00/2106; Curtis to State, 21 December 1925, 862.00/2114.
Chapter 4

Diluted Coverage: U.S. Officials Neglect the Nazis

I

The U.S. understanding of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists suffered throughout the second half of the 1920s as American officials focused their attention on Germany’s reentry into the international affairs of Europe. For the first time since World War I, Germany, led by Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, began reestablishing itself on the world stage via multiple treaties and agreements. While not directly involved, the United States closely, and approvingly, watched the events unfold. The implementation of the Dawes Plan in 1924 had led to a great deal of American investment in the German economy, and the U.S. government had long supported the modification of Germany’s constrained international situation.¹ Numerous diplomatic reports soon suggested that Germany’s actions not only represented its return to the international scene but also demonstrated a positive new phase in the German-American relationship made possible by a revitalized Germany. Yet despite the optimistic evaluations of Germany’s foreign

policy progress, newly arrived American officials failed to adequately evaluate its contentious political and economic situation. Most strikingly, they overemphasized domestic developments that seemed to illustrate a commitment to the Weimar Republic and discounted the strength of anti-republican sentiment in the country. When it came to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists, U.S. diplomats underestimated their determination to rebuild and make their presence felt throughout Germany. These breakdowns in understanding left the United States unprepared for the situation it would face at the end of the decade.

Germany’s state of affairs during the mid- to late 1920s deceived American observers. The country’s international position had improved, but it struggled domestically. U.S. diplomats often failed to recognize that the positive international developments they highlighted did not directly translate into beneficial domestic improvements. Notwithstanding its more secure world standing, Germany could not create a stable government. U.S. officials glossed over or ignored numerous instances of the Weimar Republic’s weakness and ongoing anti-republican sentiment throughout the country. Instead of investigating these developments, American diplomats optimistically envisioned a flourishing Germany.

Although Germany’s domestic turmoil was not a dominant concern, American officials dutifully reported the problems that existed in forming government cabinets and to some degree covered the constant havoc caused by reactionary right-wing parties within the government. They remained unconcerned, however, when regardless of previous pronouncements otherwise, Germany could not establish a stable, long-term
functioning cabinet. As problems continued to develop, official dispatches lacked both detail and analysis and the American understanding of Germany suffered.

The change of U.S. personnel based in Germany that had occurred in 1925 greatly affected officials’ ability to accurately evaluate the situation. Alanson Houghton had left Germany in February 1925. Jacob Gould Schurman, his replacement and long-time Republican operative, arrived in June. The new ambassador quickly immersed himself in German social circles, aided by his understanding of the country stemming from a year spent studying there over three decades earlier. While Houghton had balanced his coverage with details of both Germany’s economic and political situation, Schurman focused on the financial situation, particularly the implementation of the Dawes Plan. And unlike his predecessor, Schurman did not closely monitor the situation in Bavaria.

Concurrently, the quality of coverage coming from Bavaria plummeted with the departure of Robert Murphy during the summer of 1925. Charles Curtis, his replacement, seemed overwhelmed by the responsibility of his task, often spending more time listing trivial information than covering political developments. He would be replaced in 1927 by Charles M. Hathaway, Jr. The coverage improved somewhat, however, Hathaway had no background in German politics as he had spent the previous five years in Ireland. And specific coverage of the National Socialists suffered. As the decade ended, the growing significance of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists surprised the United States.

II

U.S. policymakers viewed the German situation optimistically in the second half of the 1920s, convinced that the foreign policy developments of the period represented the commencement of the restoration of Germany to the world stage. While not directly involved with the treaties and agreements affecting Germany, the United States participated in the “behind-the-scenes efforts” to ensure that the agreements met with American desires, including the “fulfillment” of the Dawes Plan. Schurman considered Germany the lynchpin of European financial stability, and had arrived pledging to ensure the proper application of the plan.

Due to the heavy financial stake of American businesses in the German economy following 1924, the U.S. government believed that it should help clear “all obstacles in the way of Germany’s economic recovery.” That meant support for changes in Germany’s international position. Throughout these steps, the United States watched from the sidelines, stepping in only when necessary to mediate, particularly when dealing with economic issues. The first step for Germany had been the Locarno treaties of 1925. Meeting in Locarno, Switzerland, in late 1925, the western world powers of Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy signed a “Treaty of Mutual Guarantee” with Germany in


4 Moser, Jacob Gould Schurman, 182-83.


addition to various arbitration treaties. The “Treaty of Mutual Guarantee,” also known as the Rhineland Pact, was a “multilateral regional security agreement.” In it, Germany, France, and Belgium pledged that they would not attack each other and Britain and Italy agreed to act as guarantors. While guaranteeing its boundaries to the west, Germany made sure to sign arbitration treaties only with its neighbors to the east, Poland and Czechoslovakia. These agreements illustrated the initial shift away from the confrontational relationship between Germany and the powers of Europe that had existed since the conclusion of World War I.

To further solidify its international position, Germany moved next to deal with the power to its east. Following the Locarno treaties, Germany wanted to reassure the Soviet Union about its new relationship with the western powers. Thus, the two countries signed the 1926 Treaty of Berlin, which promised neutrality if one were to be attacked and “non-participation in any coalition using an economic boycott against either power.” Prior to signing the treaty, Germany did fear that the United States might take issue with this agreement, which could “raise the specter of bolshevism and cast doubt on

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10 Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy, 4.
11 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 419.
Germany’s commitment to fulfillment of the Versailles treaty and to European security.”
When German officials contacted Ambassador Jacob Gould Schurman about the agreement, however, he quickly assured them that the German government should maintain its ties with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{12}

Next on the German diplomatic agenda was achieving the nation’s long-standing goal of gaining membership in the League of Nations. Joining the world body, one U.S. official reported, would allow Germany “to urge the revision of impracticable treaties and to cooperate in the work of the [League] Council in connection with the Saar and Danzig Administrations, colonial mandates, and the problem of racial minorities,” in other words, many of the day’s most pressing international issues.\textsuperscript{13} By 1926, Foreign Minister Stresemann averred, Germany had earned the “right to cooperate in the solution of important international problems.”\textsuperscript{14} Ambassador Schurman further noted that should Germany’s request for admission be denied, it would likely “veer toward closer relations with Russia,” a potentially disastrous development for a U.S. government that still refused to recognize the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{15} Schurman’s fears were misplaced, however, as

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\textsuperscript{12} Jonas, \textit{The United States and Germany}, 185.
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\textsuperscript{13} Fayette W. Allport, “Weekly Report,” 15 February 1926, enclosure to Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 19 February 1926, 862.00/2147, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
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\textsuperscript{14} Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 7 July 1926, 862.00/2219, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
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\textsuperscript{15} Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 2 June 1926, 862.00/2201, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
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not only was Germany admitted to the League of Nations in September but it also secured a highly coveted permanent seat on the League’s Council.\textsuperscript{16} In this way, the twin American goals of reintegrating Germany into western European affairs and preventing it from moving closer to the Soviet Union were met simultaneously.\textsuperscript{17}

Once Germany’s international position had been reestablished, the United States moved to include it in agreements. In April 1928, Gustav Stresemann publicly pledged Germany’s support of the proposed Kellogg-Briand Pact, a multilateral renunciation of war that would become official in August of that year.\textsuperscript{18} When announced in Germany, the pact had widespread support among the majority of the political parties.\textsuperscript{19} Three months later, Schurman notified the State Department that the German government stood ready to officially sign the agreement, the first government to do so.\textsuperscript{20} In February 1929, the United States agreed to a “Treaty of Conciliation with Germany.”\textsuperscript{21} The treaty

\textsuperscript{16} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 419.

\textsuperscript{17} Jonas, \textit{The United States and Germany}, 186.

\textsuperscript{18} Jonas, \textit{The United States and Germany}, 189-90.

\textsuperscript{19} Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 27 June 1928, 711.6212 Anti War/47, Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations Between the United States and Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{20} Moser, \textit{Jacob Gould Schurman}, 167.

\textsuperscript{21} The official signing of the treaty occurred in May 1929. For the text of the treaty, see Department of State, “Treaty Between The United States and Germany: Conciliation” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929).
established an international commission that would investigate disputes between the two countries.²²

These attempts to reconcile the relationships between Germany and the world powers suggested the beginning of a new era in Europe. U.S. officials not only viewed the changes favorably but also opined that they would lead to a more stable Germany as a whole. Yet, international improvements did not translate into political or economic stability at home for the country. In fact, the political situation remained tenuous as German political parties struggled to cooperate and extremist parties on the right kept pressure on all the parties. Plus, despite American predictions to the contrary, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists lingered as a persistent presence within the extremist right.

III

Even as Germany’s international situation improved, its domestic state of affairs remained turbulent when it came to economic and political matters. The period witnessed a growing disconnect between American perceptions of the situation in Germany and the actual state of affairs on the ground. In particular, high ranking American officials tended to be overly optimistic regarding domestic conditions, going as

²² Henry L. Stimson to President Herbert Hoover, 26 June 1929, 711.6212/34, Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations Between the United States and Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
far as to profess that stability had been achieved and to occasionally discount counter
opinions from their own staff.

American officials mainly believed this to be the case when evaluating
Germany’s economic situation and the intertwined issue of the Dawes Plan. As 1926
opened many American officials believed that Germany’s economy had finally turned the
corner and that the Dawes Plan had helped in this process. From the 1924 inception of
the Dawes Plan, the United States anticipated that it would be the first step in the
economic stabilization of Europe. In 1926 Ambassador Jacob Gould Schurman claimed
that the plan had achieved that initial goal, contending that Germany was quickly
recovering, even faster than some of its “late enemies.” And he stressed that S. Parker
Gilbert, the agent general for reparations, looked favorably on the developing economic
situation in Germany.23

But not all Americans in Germany concurred. One American commercial attaché,
C. E. Herring, warned the State Department that the German economy still faced a
prolonged road to recovery. Herring argued that among Americans based in Germany
“there is a growing realization that the process of economic rehabilitation on a sound
basis will probably be long and painful.”24 So while the ambassador and others like
Gilbert viewed the situation as improving and positive, Herring suggested that those

23 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 30 April 1926, 862.00/2182, Records of the Department of
State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives,
Washington, D.C.

24 C. E. Herring, “Weekly Report,” 18 January 1926 enclosure to Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of
State, 18 January 1926, 862.00/2125, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of
the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
dealing directly with the economic situation disagreed. In April 1926, another commercial attaché, Fayette W. Allport, noted that although Germany continued to meet the economic terms of the Dawes Plan, there was growing concern that the strain would be too much.²⁵ Ambassador Schurman directly discounted Allport’s account. He forwarded it to the State Department but cautioned against fully accepting the attaché’s pessimistic evaluation of the Dawes Plan. Allport, S. Parker Gilbert contended, appeared “to have swallowed whole” the German position regarding the reparations burden. Gilbert actually warned Schurman that “it would be very unfortunate . . . if the Department of Commerce should publish the Commercial Attaché’s report or any statement based on it” as France and Belgium would see it as “the German stock argument and be perturbed.” Schurman concurred with Gilbert’s argument and asserted that the burden of reparations had actually led Germany “to perfect its economic efficiency” and that as a result the nation could come out of the “misfortune stronger than its export competitors, except the United States.”²⁶ Allport seemed to have received the message that he was out of step with official thinking in time for his end of the fiscal year report of 10 June 1926, in which, he noted that “the past year has been one of progress” and that “the Dawes Plan is functioning satisfactory to all appearances.”²⁷

²⁵ Fayette W. Allport, “Weekly Report,” 21 April 1926 enclosure to Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 30 April 1926, 862.00/2182.

²⁶ Schurman to State, 30 April 1926, 862.00/2182.

²⁷ Fayette W. Allport, “Special Report No. 157,” 10 June 1926, enclosure to Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 14 June 1926, 862.00/2208, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
For most Germans, the Dawes Plan also had political implications, but U.S. officials never acknowledged this association. From the start, American officials solely viewed the plan in economic terms. In a listing of Germany’s problems in June 1926, Ambassador Schurman stated, “Germany’s other foreign problems are mainly economic. First, the Dawes Plan.”

Conversely, many German leaders linked the economic provisions of the Dawes Plan to potential political improvements. They believed that submitting to the provisions of the plan would lead to direct political benefits, particularly the revision of the Treaty of Versailles. At least one German leader even drew a connection between the provisions of the Dawes Plan and the political leanings of the German people. In a conversation with Schurman, Dr. Julius Curtius, the minister of economics, argued that “a prosperous Germany was of much more value to the Allies than an impoverished Germany” and warned that the more impoverished Germans were the higher the “danger of driving the working classes (and others) to Communism” was.

For Germany, the Dawes Plan had broad political implications, implications that the U.S. government failed to accurately assess.

Germany’s political situation remained a secondary concern for American officials, in spite of the fact that throughout American reports, constant, albeit exaggerated, references to improved political conditions in Germany abound. The

28 Schurman to State, 2 June 1926, 862.00/2201.

29 Jonas, The United States and Germany, 183-84.

30 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 2 June 1927, 862.00/2349, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
presidential administration of Paul von Hindenburg did provide a great deal of stability in terms of the overall thrust of the government. First elected in 1925, Hindenburg served as president until 1934. Yet, the actual functioning of the government really remained in flux, most dramatically represented by numerous challenges to and constant changes of the chancellor and his cabinet.

In January 1925, Hans Luther had turned to the German National People’s Party (the Nationalists) to help form a coalition cabinet.31 By the end of the year, the Nationalists had withdrawn from the coalition due to Luther’s negotiation of the Locarno treaties. While much of Germany supported the negotiations, the political parties on the right did not, and the Nationalists made a stand against the government on the issue. As 1926 opened, Luther created a new coalition cabinet, with the German Democratic Party replacing the Nationalists. This was a stop-gap measure at best, however, as Luther failed to get any support from the two largest parties in Germany, the Nationalists and the Social Democrats (the Socialists). As a result, this new coalition remained unstable for its duration.32 Significantly, American officials did not identify these problems for the government as something that could or would counter Germany’s successful international steps.33

31 The other coalition members were the Center party, the Bavarian People’s Party, and the German People’s Party, along with non-partisan members. Elmer D. Graper, “Cabinet Changes in Germany since Hindenburg’s Election,” The American Political Science Review, 21 (Nov., 1927): 859.

32 Graper, “Cabinet Changes in Germany since Hindenburg’s Election,” 859-60.

33 Klaus Schwabe contends that “the supreme American diplomatic error in the 1920s was the illusion that economic means could solve any political problem in Europe.” Schwabe, “The United States and the Weimar Republic,” 27.
Although not strong, the Luther government managed to secure control for a few months. By May 1926, however, what may have seemed an insignificant issue, the flying of the old imperial flag, managed to topple the cabinet. Luther’s cabinet backed a change in government policy and voted to allow “German diplomatic, consular, and other government officers abroad” to fly the old imperial flag alongside the flag prescribed by the Weimar Constitution. Non-coalition members, the Democrats, the Socialists, and the Communists, joined to defeat the cabinet on the measure, which they felt defeated the ideals of the democratic republic of Weimar.34 This issue, along with the fact that the cabinet itself was not effective, led to Luther’s cabinet stepping down on 12 May 1926.35 American officials remained strikingly quiet about the event despite its illustration that even Luther’s cabinet supported a change that would have led the Weimar Republic to sanction favorable displays of the flag of the defeated German Empire.

Even before the formation of the next government, another issue arose that illustrated persistent anti-republican sentiment. Following the failure of the second Luther cabinet, Hindenburg turned to a familiar face to organize a new government, Wilhelm Marx, Center Party member and the chancellor prior to Hans Luther. As Marx assembled his government, American officials noted that one issue could complicate the general political stability in Germany, a 20 June referendum on the potential expropriation of the property of German princes.36 The Communist Party-sponsored

34 Graper, “Cabinet Changes in Germany since Hindenburg’s Election,” 861.
35 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 419-20.
36 Schurman to State, 2 June 1926, 862.00/2201.
referendum called on the German population to decide if the government should confiscate the land of the former German royalty without compensation.\textsuperscript{37} Ambassador Schurman viewed the vote as a question of nationalization of property versus the sanctity of private property and confidently reported his belief, shared by many in Germany, that it would fail. Schurman predicted that only three general groups would back the referendum: the Communists, who favored the principle of nationalization; those who held anti-monarchial sentiment; and those who had lost their own land and wanted others to suffer “the same fate.” Schurman further posited that supporters were up against a formidable challenge as “the Government, the bourgeois political parties and business organizations” were carrying on “a widespread, if quiet, propaganda” campaign against it. Additionally banks throughout Germany were against the proposal and “the greater part of the population [has] their self-interest in the maintenance of the principle of private property.” Schurman believed that should the referendum succeed, “the course of events will be seriously disturbed.”\textsuperscript{38}

The referendum had a little more support than Schurman led the State Department to believe, as the Social Democratic Party had joined the Communists in supporting the measure; in the end, however, it fell well short of the needed majority.\textsuperscript{39} What is most striking in evaluating Schurman’s stance on the measure is that he does not consider

\textsuperscript{37} The referendum was “the first on the federal level” for the Weimar Republic. Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 420.

\textsuperscript{38} Schurman to State, 2 June 1926, 862.00/2201.

\textsuperscript{39} Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 420.
whether some opposition to it might have come from those who still revered the monarchy. Because American officials had consistently noted that support for the monarchy remained high in Germany this issue should have been addressed. That it was not constituted a glaring omission in Schurman’s reporting and leads to questions as to why he focused on the measure’s connection to the sanctity of private property rather than sentiment regarding the monarchy.

In its seventh year, the Weimar Republic still struggled due to the continuing anti-republican sentiment, of which support for the return of the monarchy was a part. The failed referendum on the property of the princes reflected this to some degree. Later in 1926, the American chargé d’affaires ad interim, DeWitt C. Poole, monitored another potential conflict between the republic and supporters of the monarchy.40 In September, General Hans von Seeckt allowed Prince Wilhelm, the grandson of Wilhelm II, the former monarch of Germany, to participate in the military exercises of the Reichswehr while in uniform.41 The prince partook of the events without “the statutory requirements of a long-term enlistment and sworn allegiance to the republic.”42 General Seeckt “had granted the permission entirely on his own authority, without having informed either his

40 DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 13 October 1926, 862.00/2253, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


42 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 24 January 1927, 862.00/2303, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Minister [of Defense, Otto Geßler] or his Supreme Commander.

This represented a breach of protocol and soon became a national story when press reports covered the episode.

The incident revealed a two prong problem for the Weimar Republic. It showed support for the monarchy by the commander of the Reichswehr. Plus, Hans von Seeckt had acted without proper authority. The Reichswehr commander had already come into conflict with Geßler, and under pressure from the government, he resigned. Poole commended Seeckt’s forced resignation and suggested “it was a great triumph for constitutionalism and republicanism and a blow to the monarchists and the monarchist sentiment which is thought by the republicans to pervade the Reichswehr.” Poole admitted that President Hindenburg had monarchist tendencies, but commended him for honoring the constitution rather than following them. Thus, despite an incident that illustrated anti-republican sentiment, Poole lauded the government’s quick action and the resignation of the commander as illustrations of the Weimar Republic’s strength.

In fact, Poole directed the attention of the State Department to a number of developments that he contended illustrated the weakening of anti-republicanism and the strengthening of the republic. The Prussian Interior Minister Carl Severing retired just prior to General Seeckt’s resignation. Poole commended Severing for “reorganiz[ing] the

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45 Poole to State, 13 October 1926, 862.00/2253.

46 Poole to State, 13 October 1926, 862.00/2253.
Prussian State Police and making it a reliable instrument of the Republic.” Other progress included the “acknowledgment of the Republic” by German industrialists and the issuing of two resolutions supporting the Weimar Constitution. A convention of Prussian judges released “a resolution expressing in emphatic terms . . . allegiance to the Republican Constitution.” The second resolution supporting the constitution originated from the membership of “the largest Civil Service employees’ league in Germany.” 47 Thus, according to an American official, the fact that groups recognized the Weimar Constitution, seven years after it had been ratified, illustrated the achievement of stability for Weimar.

By the end of the year, American officials believed that the republic had been firmly established in Germany. The reality, though, was that a weak government continued to struggle because of political issues. Marx turned to the Social Democratic Party in an attempt to have it join the ruling coalition. Because of the recent success of republicanism, the Socialists demanded that the cabinet resign first and then they would participate in the formation of a new cabinet, something Marx refused to accept without a Reichstag vote. The government failed to reach out to other non-represented parties, however, which proved particularly galling to the Nationalists. Thus, when the Reichstag held the vote, the Socialists, Nationalists, Völkische Bloc, and Communists all voted against the government and forced its dissolution in mid-December 1926. 48

47 Poole to State, 13 October 1926, 862.00/2253.

48 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 23 December 1926, 862.00/2280, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
U.S. officials closely monitored this phase of political maneuvering and seemed to have developed an understanding of the behind-the-scenes machinations by both the political right and left. For instance, Schurman summarized how each of the parties tried to blame the others for the cabinet crisis as the Socialists worked to form a Great Coalition and the Nationalists pursued a Right Coalition. Schurman pointed out that the Nationalists were trying to force Hindenburg’s hand to govern based on Article 48 of the Constitution, which gave the president of the republic the right to “temporarily” suspend basic rights in Germany and permitted the chancellor to rule by decree when “public order and security are seriously disturbed or endangered.”[49]

Yet American officials believed that republicanism had triumphed in Germany. As Schurman detailed the positions of the various parties and touched on how they hoped to influence Hindenburg, he claimed that the parties had become dependent on republicanism and parliamentary government in Germany. In particular, Schurman assigned this position to the Center Party. Despite some common beliefs, the Center Party actively opposed the maneuverings of the Nationalists during this period. Schurman speculated that the Center Party took this position as it had come to appreciate the power it held within the parliamentary system.[50]

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[50] Schurman to State, 4 January 1927, 862.00/2292.
The official negotiations to form a new government began in January and it did appear as if the Nationalists had managed to influence Hindenburg as he first gave permission for the creation of a coalition among the parties on the right. The president charged Julius Curtius of the German People’s Party with the task, but after a week Curtius reported he would be unable to form a coalition, because the Center Party had refused to join an alliance with the Nationalists. When that failed, Hindenburg commissioned Marx to see if he could form a Middle Coalition with the support of the Center Party. Schurman, though, seemed to think that the real problem remained the Nationalists, not the Center Party. It was the Nationalists, after all, who refused to “commit themselves to the Republican State and the present foreign policy.” Given the party’s departure from the Luther cabinet in late 1925 over foreign policy disagreements, this should not have surprised Schurman. That it did reveals the shortcomings in American diplomatic reporting during this period.

After the right coalition failed, Hindenburg charged Marx with putting together a cabinet of non-Socialist parties. During the ongoing stalemate, Schurman demonstrated an understanding that the governmental problems stemmed from the existence of

51 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 17 January 1927, 862.00/2298, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 13 January 1927, 862.00/2281, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

52 Schurman acknowledged “that a majority of the Nationalist Party is at bottom still hostile to the Republic and opposed to conciliation with France.” Schurman to State, 17 January 1927, 862.00/2298.

53 Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 21 January 1927, 862.00/2288, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
different political viewpoints among the major parties. He contended that “the most fundamental aspect of the current governmental crisis in Germany is the struggle between the conservative, nationalist school of thought, which is convinced of the prime efficacy of force in state policy, and the more pacific civil element, which is largely republican.”

Schurman viewed the conflict as a common one that happens anywhere, noting that all countries struggled between using more force or more diplomacy. What he did not expand on, though, was that one side of the argument in Germany called for an entirely different form of government that would require more than a revision of the constitution and could perhaps necessitate the scrapping of the constitution itself. And other than to mention that Prince Wilhelm was “thought to embody the future aspirations of the monarchists,” he did not connect lingering pro-monarchical beliefs to Germany’s ongoing political problems.

At the end of January 1927, Marx successfully formed a new cabinet, requiring the Nationalists to make concessions to become a part of the government. Specifically, they had to agree to recognize both the Locarno treaties and the republican flag. In a

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54 Schurman to State, 24 January 1927, 862.00/2303.
55 Schurman to State, 24 January 1927, 862.00/2303.
56 Schurman to State, 24 January 1927, 862.00/2303.
57 Graper, “Cabinet Changes in Germany since Hindenburg’s Election,” 862. According to Schurman, Marx officially presented the cabinet to the Reichstag on 3 February. Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 14 February 1927, 862.00/2312, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
58 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 31 January 1927, 862.00/2304, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
conversation with Schurman, Marx expressed happiness and pride in “his achievement of winning support of Nationalists for the Republic and its symbols.” The American ambassador, for his part, remained skeptical, as he felt Marx was being “unduly optimistic” since it was “generally believed and stated in print that the Nationalists were ready to sign anything for the sake of getting back to power and office and their future performances may not square with their present promises.” Despite his doubts, Schurman claimed that Marx had “strengthened the Republic by his Coalition cabinet” because he “imposed silence on the Monarchists by making them part of a Republican administration.” The ambassador believed that these actions would cause “Monarchist sentiments and ideas” to be “atrophied” or at least “weakened.” So while he acknowledged the anti-republican tendencies of the Nationalists, he optimistically believed that their participation in a coalition within a republican government would be beneficial as they would be unable to continue their public campaign against parliamentary government.

The Nationalists quickly challenged Schurman’s assumptions. During the official presentation of the cabinet to the Reichstag on 3 February, Marx elucidated the policy of the government. In particular, he stressed the sanctity of the Weimar Constitution and the government’s adherence to “existing international agreements.” In the debate that followed, Nationalist party leader Kuno Graf von Westarp marshaled “hair-splitting definitions” to claim that the Nationalists had not disavowed their opposition to the

59 Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 29 January 1927, 862.00/2295, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Locarno treaties or to parliamentary government. In fact, he declared that Nationalist inclusion in the government did not even represent “an acceptance of the republican form of government or a relinquishment of monarchist convictions.” By the end of the debate, though, members of the coalition had “repudiated” Westarp’s remarks. Rather than be concerned that Westarp’s comments illustrated a lack of commitment to the Weimar Republic, Ambassador Schurman confidently reported that these comments “were no doubt intended to placate the extremists in his party.”60 The new cabinet in his mind strengthened the German government considerably.

Schurman’s optimistic appraisal notwithstanding, the situation remained much more complex. The coalition Marx had formed included the Center Party, the Nationalists, the German People’s Party, and the Bavarian People’s Party, which together controlled only 250 of the 493 seats in the Reichstag.61 Such a bare majority would require almost unanimous agreement between coalition members, and the Nationalists had already proven a willingness to assert their independence in initially countering Marx’s official pronouncement of the government platform. Yet American officials failed to sufficiently recognize the precarious position of the new government.

Additionally, despite American emphasis on the positive foreign policy developments Germany had undertaken, the Nationalists railed against the foreign policies of their own government. In particular, they were unhappy about entrance into the League of Nations and after an early 1927 League Council meeting they attacked

60 Schurman to State, 14 February 1927, 862.00/2312.

61 Graper, “Cabinet Changes in Germany since Hindenburg’s Election,” 862.
Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann. Schurman dismissed any concerns by saying “the Nationalists’ outbursts are not taken very seriously by the other parties,” an approach that seemed counterintuitive as it represented continual opposition by a member of the coalition government to its own policy.⁶² That Nationalists’ continued intransigence on foreign policy questions also challenged Schurman’s earlier assertion that by participating in the government, the party’s anti-republican tendencies would be weakened.

Even at the end of June 1927, Schurman’s optimism regarding the Marx cabinet persisted as he argued that it had stabilized the political situation. But he also asserted that while the Nationalists remained unhappy that Stresemann had not been able to make any foreign policy improvements, they seemed to have resigned themselves to working with him.⁶³ At about the same time, DeWitt Poole pointed out that the Nationalists “seem determined to remain in the Government at all costs,” even as their opposition to its policies persisted.⁶⁴

Despite believing that the Nationalists were working within the parliamentary system, Schurman also reported that the party continued to express anti-republican

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⁶² Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 15 March 1927, 862.00/2323, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶³ Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 27 June 1927, 862.00/2351, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁴ DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 12 July 1927, 862.00/2355, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
sentiment at its annual convention in order to placate the party’s hard liners. According to Schurman, Westarp began his speech with “temperate” remarks, but then shifted to criticizing the current situation, calling for the “Love of Fatherland, preparedness, strict discipline, duty and honor” to “be aroused in the German people in order that they might liberate themselves internally from un-German ways and a form of Government foreign to Germans; and externally, from the yoke of slavery.” By stressing order and discipline within the Fatherland, Westarp hoped to keep appealing to those who wished for a return to a system where power emanated from the top. Schurman took Westarp’s aggressive words at face value. He claimed that “the monarchist asseverations in the concluding speech were probably intended to appease the radical elements in the Nationalist Party rather than to stress the existence of a deep gap between the political aims of the Nationalists and those of the other Government parties.” All the evidence Schurman and Poole conveyed showed that while the Nationalists had agreed to concessions to join the government, they continued to utilize anti-republican sentiment to energize supporters.

U.S. officials closed out 1927 touching on the continuing debate in Germany between centralism and federalism. Schurman acknowledged that this issue pitted the nation’s political parties against each other as “the parties of the left and the liberal parties advocate a more centralized form of Government on the ground of efficiency and economy in administration” while conservatives favored “the federal character of the

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65 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 29 September 1927, 862.00/2372, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The ambassador did believe that Germany had been slowly moving toward centralization despite the fact that “historical inertia and local patriotism in the south of Germany worked against centralization.” Poole further noted that the state most opposed to centralization remained Bavaria, in part due to its “old enmity and rivalry” with Prussia. And in a nod to the coming elections of 1928, Poole suggested that parties of the left might make centralization “the ‘paramount issue’ of the coming campaign.”

IV

As U.S. officials focused on Germany’s international and national affairs, Adolf Hitler took the necessary steps to solidify his control of the National Socialists below the American radar. Despite Hitler’s best efforts following his release from prison, he still struggled to control the actions of the party in 1926. The party itself had witnessed some success by splitting into factions and the leaders of those factions disagreed on the proper course of events for the extremist party. The U.S. vice counsel based in Munich

66 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 17 October 1927, 862.00/2376, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

67 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 31 October 1927, 862.00/2380, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

68 DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 14 November 1927, 862.00/2383, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
exhibited a general concern regarding “Bavarian Reactionary Extremists.”\footnote{Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 26 January 1926, 862.00/2138, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} His reports, however, failed to monitor the actions and meetings of the National Socialists. Thus, as Hitler successfully positioned himself as the dominant figure in the party and reorganized it to begin an assault from within the electoral system in Germany, U.S. diplomats were not paying close attention.

As 1926 opened, rather than being worried about Germany’s domestic and international positions, Adolf Hitler concentrated on problems closer to home. While he had served his prison term, the Nazi Party had expanded throughout Germany, particularly in the north. By late 1925, party leaders there were becoming disenchanted as Hitler reasserted his power and tried to regain control of the party. In September, the northern leaders began drafting a new program for the NSDAP.\footnote{Dietrich Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party: 1919-1933 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 67-68.} They were upset with the centralized control of the party in Munich as it delayed such things as issuing membership cards.\footnote{Joseph L. Nyomarkay, “Factionalism in the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, 1925-26: The Myth and Reality of the ‘Northern Faction,’” Political Science Quarterly 80 (Mar., 1965): 31-32.} In January 1926, two dozen disaffected northern leaders held a conference in Hannover, Germany. There they formed the “Working Association of the North and West,” elected officers, and “stressed socialistic reforms in domestic politics and advocated a pro-Russian foreign policy.” Yet, they did not publicly repudiate Hitler
because in the end, they “knew that without Hitler the party could not survive.” They hoped instead that Hitler would come to understand the need to expand his vision and plan for the National Socialists.73

The northern Nazi leaders badly miscalculated their importance. Responding to their efforts, Hitler called a meeting of his own in Bamberg, Germany, to deal with the factional conflict.74 It was the first meeting of the major Nazi leaders called by Hitler since his release from prison.75 At the meeting, Hitler directly opposed the decisions taken by the northern faction. He favored an alliance with the West and disagreed with the support of socialism advocated by the Working Association of the North and West.76 Hitler also referred to the 1920 party program as the “foundation” of the organization, and argued that “the necessity of party unity” would not allow the faction to continue its separatist activities.77 One historian contends that after speaking for five hours, Hitler “forced the Nazi leaders to choose between rejection of his leadership or acceptance of his self-deification” and the northern faction chose the latter.78

72 Nyomarkay, “Factionalism in the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, 1925-26,” 35.

73 Nyomarkay, “Factionalism in the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, 1925-26,” 41.

74 Nyomarkay, “Factionalism in the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, 1925-26,” 36.

75 Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 68.


American coverage during this time period ranged from poor to non-existent. U.S. observers had made no mention of the proceedings in the first two months of 1926. Given that the events were closely controlled political events, it is not all that surprising. But even when Hitler and the National Socialists made it into the official reports, there seemed to be a lack of real concern. For example, Charles Curtis, the American consul general based in Munich, mentioned in March that the local police had forbidden Hitler to speak at a February meeting of the Nazis. The only additional material he provides was that when the party objected, “the reply was made that party meetings were not forbidden provided other speakers were chosen.” Curtis then moved on to an entirely different subject.\(^79\) He exhibited the same behavior in July, noting once again in passing that the Munich police forbade Hitler from speaking at a June meeting of the National Socialists. And again, the American official then moved on to an unrelated subject.\(^80\)

American diplomats also failed to provide any analysis of the 1926 party congress, the first national congress held since the failed putsch took place in Munich.\(^81\) After the events of the beginning of the year, Hitler had continued to organize the party around himself, so the party congress “was a visible manifestation of Hitler’s triumph.”\(^82\)

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\(^79\) The next paragraph detailed the reinstatement of the mayor of Nuremberg to his office. Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 11 March 1926, 862.00/2164, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^80\) This time for the unrelated subject, Curtis notified the State Department that the Munich police had prohibited dancing on “the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.” Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 3 July 1926, 862.00/2221, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^81\) Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party*, 73.

\(^82\) Orlow, “The Conversion of Myths into Political Power,” 923.
Even though the National Socialists had internal issues, the congress represented Hitler’s perseverance. In dismissing him after the failed Beer Hall Putsch, U.S. officials did not make tracking him or his party a main concern during this period. Consequently, they did not gather information on the party and did not evaluate the future potential for the party or its leader in German politics. To the credit of American observers, the party itself was pretty small at the time, having only about 35,000 members.\(^8\) Thus, Hitler and the Nazis should not have been a priority, particularly from a national standpoint; but they merited more attention than given by Consul General Curtis in Bavaria.

As Hitler became more publicly active in the second half of 1926 American coverage of his activities increased, although the overall quality remained poor. But the reports often just noted problems for the National Socialist leader and lacked analysis or evaluation of Hitler’s actions. Curtis conveyed that some Hitler supporters had left the fold in August and that there were reports in Munich that he had been forced to declare bankruptcy.\(^8\) Then in December, Curtis recorded that Hitler had been in court due to charges that he broke up a meeting of a rival party, but had been acquitted. Curtis provided no other details or analysis.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Orlow bases this number on the number of people voting in the referendum on seizing the land of the princes. Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 76.

\(^8\) Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 2 September 1926, 862.00/2245, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^8\) Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 6 December 1926, 862.00/2276, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
As 1927 opened, the American coverage of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists remained sparse, but it did heat up a little due to Hitler’s activity. In February, the Völkische Party, a coalition of right-wing groups, lost its status in the Reichstag. For official representation, parties had to hold fifteen seats in the legislative body. The Völkische Party had fallen below this level after one member was expelled and others resigned. Schurman recorded that some of the representatives belonged to Hitler’s “National-Socialist Labor Party.” But other than mentioning the party’s loss of status, the ambassador failed to provide any analysis of the state of the extreme nationalist position, including the NSDAP.

Not until April 1927 did Curtis provide an extended discussion regarding Hitler’s activities in Munich, but again, the focus seemed to be on providing just the general facts. Curtis reported that since Hitler’s release from prison he had been prohibited from speaking in public, but that Munich authorities had recently relaxed the rules. Beginning in February, Hitler could speak, “subject to certain conditions, of which the principal is that neither he nor his Party shall pursue political aims which conflict with the law.” Curtis noted that Hitler had spoken multiple times and that newspaper coverage of his first engagement on 11 March claimed that the event “was so overcrowded that the doors

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86 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 28 February 1927, 862.00/2318, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

87 Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 6 April 1927, 862.00/2330, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
had to be closed before the hour set for the opening of the meeting.”  Yet Curtis
provided no information about what Hitler spoke about or why the event proved to be
such a draw and no analysis of what this incident illustrated about Hitler’s popularity or
the constant presence of reactionary politics.

The first sustained U.S. analysis of National Socialist activities came in May
1927. DeWitt Poole, the counselor of the American embassy, asserted that on the whole
domestic politics had “been comparatively quiet” but pointed out that the National
Socialists of Berlin, who were led by Joseph Goebbels, would be welcoming Hitler for a
rally there against the republican government.  While the Social Democrats celebrated
May Day, Hitler gave pretty tame remarks before “a closed party meeting,” perhaps
because the party members in Berlin already had a reputation for being “disturbers of the
peace.”  Poole noted that they held a “rowdy demonstration” that “carried so far that the
police were compelled to close the meeting and arrest a large number of the participants.”
The Prussian Ministry of the Interior subsequently ordered “the disbandment of the
organization,” which had about twenty-five hundred members, most of whom Poole
described as “unemployed with Fascist tendencies.”  Berlin’s response to these
developments created problems for the Nazis. First, it limited the action of party

88 Curtis to State, 6 April 1927, 862.00/2330.
89 DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 9 May 1927, 862.00/2338, Records of the Department of State
Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives,
Washington, D.C.
91 Poole to State, 9 May 1927, 862.00/2338.
members in Berlin. Second, it showed Hitler that the urban organizations “had failed to heed the most important organizational rule in the new NSDAP: to avoid governmental prohibition of party activities.”

Despite the setbacks in Berlin, Hitler and the National Socialists continued their activities. Curtis reported that throughout the month of May 1927 a series of conflicts occurred between the NSDAP and the Social Democrats in Munich that eventually led to “the prohibition of all political meetings in public places.” After the May Day celebration, the Nazis and Social Democrats clashed throughout the month and at least one member of the NSDAP died. The Nazis consistently worked to provoke the Socialists, such as when they marched through a poor neighborhood in Munich that was almost exclusively Social Democratic. The clash did lead the Bavarian government to prohibit public demonstrations by a Social Democratic-leaning organization and the National Socialists, although Schurman noted that many in Bavaria believed that the anti-republican groups like the National Socialists were getting more favorable treatment. Schurman also pointed to a speech by Crown Prince Rupprecht criticizing the Weimar Constitution as fueling anti-republicanism in Bavaria. Acting quickly the Bavarian

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93 Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 2 June 1927, 862.00/2347, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

94 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 1 June 1927, 862.00/2345, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
government had prohibited “all political meetings in public places” by the end of the month. Thus, organizations across the political spectrum were denied public forums. As the National Socialists attempted to gain ground, they held their party congress during August 1927 in Nuremberg. Charles Curtis did cover the meeting in his State Department dispatches. He provided a brief summary of a speech Hitler gave, in which the Nazi leader “declared that Germany’s three principal shortcomings were lack of pure blood, of talented leaders and of the instinct of self-preservation.” According to Curtis, the Bavarian press reported that 13,000 to 14,000 people participated in “a torch-light procession.” Then without any evidence whatsoever, Curtis contended, “it seems safe to say that the meeting was not a great success and that the number of Hitler’s followers is steadily decreasing.” Like other U.S. officials, Curtis failed to see that the “well-planned parades, mass rallies, and torchlight demonstrations” successfully centered Hitler as the leader of the movement.

As 1927 came to a close, American officials in Munich largely ignored National Socialist activity and focused instead on national events, particularly the conflict between centralism and federalism, which was centered in Bavaria. Chancellor Marx visited the city in November 1927. Charles M. Hathaway, Jr., the new American consul general in Munich, reported that in a speech before the Bavarian Landtag, Marx assured Bavarians

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95 Curtis to State, 2 June 1927, 862.00/2347.

96 Charles B. Curtis to Secretary of State, 7 September 1927, 862.00/2368, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

97 Orlow, A History of the Nazi Party, 114.
that he supported the “maintenance” of state control and would not be attempting to centralize power as chancellor.98 Officials neglected to cover the relentless party organization under Hitler’s direction and did not note that the NSDAP had begun concentrating on the electoral process in Germany as the year ended.99

V

Despite pronouncements of stability and constant American hope that the Marx government would be able to revitalize Germany, as 1928 began the country’s political situation remained tenuous. Numerous issues dominated the day-to-day affairs of the government, including a controversial school bill, farm relief, war claims, and budget concerns.100 In February 1928, Jacob Gould Schurman noted that an attack of sciatica had prevented Chancellor Marx from actively working during the month. The ambassador listed the legislative problems facing the Marx cabinet and warned the State Department that the “Coalition Government cannot last.”101 Schurman’s assessment this

98 Charles M. Hathaway, Jr. to Secretary of State, 18 November 1927 enclosure to DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 22 November 1927, 862.00/2386, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Charles M. Hathaway, Jr. to Secretary of State, 21 December 1927, 862.00/2395, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


100 Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 13 February 1928, 862.00/2397, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

101 Schurman tel to State, 13 February 1928, 862.00/2397.
time turned out to be accurate. In March, Hindenburg adjourned the Reichstag and scheduled new elections to be held 20 May 1928. 102

The election results came as somewhat of a surprise to American officials. Because of the recent problems of the coalition government, many Germans and U.S. officials believed that some parties, particularly the Nationalists, would lose support. The predictions proved accurate as the Nationalists had suffered the most. Additionally, the Center and the Peoples’ Party lost seats. Yet, the same officials were unprepared when the Nationalists suffered losses “much larger than careful observers have predicted.” The beneficiaries of the shift were the Social Democrats, who made the most gains, and the Communists. 103

It took almost a month to form a coalition government. Schurman predicted that there would be some coalition of Social Democrats, Center, People’s Party, and Democrats, with the “socialistic tendencies of the Social-Democrats” being “well balanced by the People’s and Center Parties.” He believed that this type of coalition would ensure the “unobstructed continuation of Dr. Stresemann’s foreign policy.” 104 In fact, Schurman felt that the election substantiated his previous reports that republican government had been firmly established in Germany. The ambassador notified the State Department that the results “signify consolidation of the Republic and vigorous

102 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 422.

103 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 25 May 1928, 862.00/2417, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

104 Schurman to State, 25 May 1928, 862.00/2417.
continuation of the foreign policies of peace and understanding.” In late June, the head of the Social Democratic Party, Hermann Müller, took the reins of the government, but because he had failed to gain the support of a majority of Reichstag deputies, his cabinet was approved as a transitional one with the understanding that a new cabinet would be formed in the fall.

The election results also seemed to reaffirm Schurman’s view of the political right in Germany. He interpreted the loss of support for the Nationalists to mean that Stresemann’s opponents, the Nationalists and the National Socialists, were “doomed to a fruitless opposition.” And in many ways, the May election represented failure for the National Socialists. They had run candidates in all the German districts, yet had received 100,000 fewer votes than in the December 1924 elections. Schurman pointed out that while the NSDAP had received twelve seats in the Reichstag, it still fell below the threshold of fifteen and would therefore need to join a coalition with another party. Even in the face of defeat, though, Hitler began planning his next moves. Seeing

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105 Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 22 May 1928, 862.00/2411, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


107 Schurman to State, 25 May 1928, 862.00/2417.


109 Schurman to State, 25 May 1928, 862.00/2417.
unexpected support in rural Germany, he shifted his organizational focus to take advantage of dissatisfaction in the countryside.\textsuperscript{110}

By August 1928, the cabinet faced its first predicament when it approved the construction of “battleship A,” the first heavy cruiser to be built by Germany since World War I. The Social Democrats had opposed the cruiser’s construction in the run-up to the May elections.\textsuperscript{111} But despite leading the Müller cabinet, the party felt powerless to continue their opposition to the cruiser as it would probably result in the downfall of the cabinet.\textsuperscript{112} As the issue developed, DeWitt Poole noted on 14 November that “the Government is not strong; it is only a loose coalition.”\textsuperscript{113} Two days later, members of the Müller cabinet basically “registered a vote of no confidence in their own administration” as they supported a motion to halt construction of the cruiser.\textsuperscript{114} Despite this turn of events, just four days later Poole reported that “the Republic has just celebrated its tenth anniversary and is generally said to be more firmly established than ever.”\textsuperscript{115}

The Müller cabinet survived, but it never managed to develop a coalition that resulted in a reliable majority. By February 1929, another major cabinet crisis occurred.

\textsuperscript{110} Orlow, \textit{A History of the Nazi Party}, 129-33.


\textsuperscript{112} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 424.

\textsuperscript{113} DeWitt C. Poole to Secretary of State, 14 November 1928, 862.00/2438, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{114} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 425.

\textsuperscript{115} Poole to State, 20 November 1928, 862.00/2438.
Jacob Gould Schurman asserted that “the numerous political parties with their egoistic programs and partisan attitudes amid which public interests are submerged” were to blame. He contended that “among the general public there is much anxiety and no little pessimism.” The ambassador made it a point to stress to the State Department that “it is recognized that a return of the monarchy is impossible and a dictatorship like that in Italy or Spain unacceptable to the German people.” Even though politics had been constrained by this behavior Schurman still believed that the situation could be salvaged. He felt the parties would see that “the only alternative to parliamentary government is political chaos,” which would lead the “discordant parties to get together with the exception of the two extremes of communism and chauvinism.”

Despite previous American praise for the strength of parliamentary government in the second half of the 1920s, it appeared to be falling apart by 1929. The one constant during that period had been Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, whose efforts had helped to bring Germany back into the international arena. Yet Schurman noted in March that Stresemann’s “position in German politics is weaker than I have ever known it.” All of the government’s foreign policy efforts, so lauded by the United States, had not resulted in an improved position for Germany. Schurman lamented that Stresemann’s foreign policy program “is increasingly criticized not only by the reactionary Nationalists but also by the Center or Catholic party and by moderate people irrespective of political

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116 Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2451, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
affiliation.” Before Stresemann could respond to the criticism, he unexpectedly died of a stroke in October. The loss of the staunchest supporter of the coalition government led to further weakening of parliamentary system in Germany.118

U.S. military intelligence painted a somewhat different picture of the situation in Germany early in 1929. Like Schurman, military intelligence reporters blamed Germany’s political problems on the political parties themselves, in particular the machinations of the Center and People’s Parties. George E. A. Reinberg, the assistant military attaché for air, suggested that “the general public and a good part of the more independent press is becoming thoroughly sick of party intrigue, selfishness and misrule.”119 In many ways, though, that is where Schurman’s analysis stopped. Reinberg appeared to have a better understanding of the pulse of the German public, suggesting that “perhaps never before in Germany have the words ‘dictator,’ ‘dictatorship’ and ‘strong hand’ been used so freely and frequently as they are at present in conversation and in all shades of the press, whether pro or contra.” Military officials seemed to counter Schurman’s contention that the German people thought a dictatorship unacceptable. Although they felt it was “highly improbable that a German Mussolini will arise in the near future” due to the “lack of unity” in Germany, Reinberg then evaluated individuals who could be seen as potential “strong m[e]n” in the country, including Adolf

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117 Schurman tel to State, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2451.

118 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 428-29.

119 George E. A. Reinberg, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of February, 1929,” 11 March 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10043, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Hitler. 

While they dismissed Hitler as having too small a support base to become a dictator in Germany, the officials’ identification of strong anti-republican sentiment and of Hitler as a potential dictator showed foresight lacking in Schurman’s dispatches.

In fact, Edward Carpenter, the military attaché as 1929 began, had already submitted a report, “The So-Called ‘German Fascisti,’” on Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. Carpenter noted that American journalists referred to the NSDAP as the German Fascisti in order to identify the National Socialists as members of the extreme right, not to be confused with socialists of the extreme left. As the military attaché summarized their basic beliefs, he stressed their anti-Semitism, “fanatic nationalism,” and desire for a dictatorship.

American officials asserted at the end of the year that the Nazis led the chorus of complaints about the reparations negotiations that had resulted in the announcement of the Young Plan in August. In fact, the political right in Germany had organized a movement against acceptance of the Young Plan even before the negotiations ended. Despite Nazi Party members’ distrust of the German National People’s Party, Hitler

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121 Edward Carpenter, “The So-Called ‘German Fascisti,’” 17 January 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #9942, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

122 Carpenter spent additional time showing how American journalists often referred to political parties and organizations with names that did not accurately translate the German. Carpenter, “The So-Called ‘German Fascisti,’” 17 January 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #9942.

123 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 426.
joined them in sponsoring an effort for a nationwide plebiscite to reject the reparations plan.\textsuperscript{124} Military intelligence monitored the efforts of the right and summarized the steps necessary to create a law via referendum. For the first step, 10 percent of the voting electorate was required to sign a petition in support of the proposed “Law against the Enslavement of Germany.”\textsuperscript{125} Schuman noted that despite a slow start, the signature effort gained steam in early November.\textsuperscript{126} The petitioners had barely cleared their first hurdle and the German government scheduled the official referendum for 22 December.\textsuperscript{127}

Although most American observers remained confident that the plebiscite would fail, some also began noting a shift in the leadership of Germany’s right wing. Military attaché Edward Carpenter noticed a developing trend before the referendum vote, the “shifting of constituents from the German Nationalist Party to the National Socialist Party (Fascist Party).” Carpenter suggested that the NSDAP, led by Hitler, supported the referendum in order to “radicalize the Nationalists and to lead Nationalist leaders into a

\textsuperscript{124} Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 173.

\textsuperscript{125} Edward Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of October,” 22 November 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10506, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{126} Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 11 November 1929, 862.00/2470, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{127} Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of October,” 22 November 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10506.
trap.” In campaigning for the referendum, Hitler and Alfred Hugenberg, the Nationalist leader, had publicly declared their opposition to the Young Plan. Yet many members of the Nationalist Party disagreed with Hugenberg’s position and a split occurred in the party. In the process, Hitler became “the most conspicuous figure in the campaign against [the Young Plan] and the republic.”

According to U.S. officials, the referendum campaign led to a shift in the electorate. The more radical members of the German Nationalist People’s Party seemed to cast their votes for the NSDAP in local elections. As an example, Carpenter pointed to recent voting in Berlin. In elections for the city government, the Nationalists lost seven seats while the National Socialists gained thirteen. Ambassador Schurman had mentioned the Nazi gains in Berlin as well. He also reported that while results were not fully tallied for elections throughout Prussia, Saxony, and Hesse, the preliminary reports illustrated the “loss of Nationalists with corresponding gains of the National Socialists or Fascists who are their allies in the coming referendum.” Later, Carpenter added

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130 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 429.

131 Davidson, The Making of Adolf Hitler, 277.


133 Schurman also commented that the Communists had made gains in all areas. Jacob Gould Schurman told Secretary of State, 18 November 1929, 862.00/2468, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Bavaria and Thuringia to the list of states where Nationalists had lost support and the NSDAP had gained.¹³⁴

When voters eventually did go to the polls on 22 December 1929, they resoundingly defeated the “Law against the Enslavement of Germany.” Approval of the referendum required 21 million votes; only 5.8 million Germans voted in favor. Shortly after the referendum, the Reichstag officially approved the Young Plan.¹³⁵ But the events illustrated more problems for Germany. The German Nationalist Party had split into two parties.¹³⁶ Schurman warned that “the multiplicity of political parties is a real menace to the Republic for they make stable efficient and responsible government extraordinarily difficult.”¹³⁷ And Hitler had been unleashed. Carpenter warned that “to take a common stand with the Hitler people is a dangerous undertaking for any party. Hitler’s idea seems to be to keep everything and everybody in turmoil, and those who do not cater to his ideas are ruthlessly thrown overboard.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Edward Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of December 1929,” 23 December 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10564, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁵ Davidson, The Making of Adolf Hitler, 278.

¹³⁶ Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of December 1929,” 23 December 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10564, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁷ Jacob Gould Schurman tel to Secretary of State, 24 December 1929, 862.00/2479, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁸ Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of October,” 22 November 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10506.
The second half of the 1920s presented, on the one hand, the reentry of Germany into world politics. American officials focused on this development and speculated that Germany seemed to be more stable than it had been in the past both economically and politically. On the other hand, just below the surface, turmoil in the country continued. Over a span of four years, the government struggled to create a ruling coalition. Rather than stabilizing and becoming consistent, German politics seemed to be just as unstable as in the past.

Throughout this period, American officials seemed to discount the instability as growing pains and did not express too much concern about the lack of consistency. Rather, they emphasized foreign policy successes and stressed that the Weimar Republic had become stronger than ever. Yet anti-republican sentiment remained high and a reactionary party left for dead began making noise by the end of the period. U.S. observers had been overly optimistic and simplistic in their appraisals of the nation’s political situation. Instead of Germany ending the decade with a strong parliamentary government, anti-republican forces, albeit those calling for a dictatorship, appeared to have an even larger foothold than before. As events turned, Washington sent out a new memorandum on what should be included in political dispatches. One clear point made was an emphasis on quality reports. Assistant Secretary of State William R. Castle suggested to DeWitt Poole that “the Department would be pleased to receive fewer and shorter political despatches, but political despatches showing more care and thought,
above all more evidence that the material has been selected and analyzed. The very fact that such a stricture had to be issued suggests that previous reports failed to meet that standard.

139 “Memorandum on Political Despatches,” enclosure to William R. Castle, Assistant Secretary of State, to DeWitt C. Poole, Counselor of Embassy, Berlin, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2454a, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Chapter 5

Lingering Confusion: U.S. Officials Struggle to Reassess the Nazis

I

The failure of American officials to adequately assess both the German political situation and the strength and growing success of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists continued into the 1930s. Throughout the late 1920s, U.S. officials had believed that an improvement in Germany’s world position would lead to its domestic stability. This focus on international concerns had meant inadequate attention to Germany’s simmering internal situation, which left American policymakers unprepared for the state of affairs that followed. The illusion of potential stability should have been shattered at the beginning of the 1930s when U.S. diplomats noted the hostilities and turmoil present within the German political arena. Their reports illustrated that despite constant efforts to create a secure majority ruling coalition, German parliamentary groups proved incapable of working together. In surveying the domestic scene in early 1930, an American official predicted that the political difficulties would persist, as “internal problems in Germany tend to accentuate the differences between the parties.”  

1 John C. Wiley to Secretary of State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
tumultuous situation, U.S. policymakers mistakenly continued to believe that the maneuvering would eventually lead to political stability. Instead, as the discord increased, and so did the visibility and strength of the extremist parties. More problematic, even as the coverage of anti-republican tendencies and the rise of political radicalism increased in American dispatches, U.S. officials seemed initially indifferent to the rapidly mounting political achievements of Hitler and the Nazis, at least until those achievements could no longer be ignored.

Throughout American coverage in the early 1930s, a strain of optimism persisted despite the deterioration of parliamentary government in Germany. U.S. officials correctly recorded infighting within traditional political parties like the German National People’s Party (the Nationalists) and a discernible increase in the visibility of the German Communist Party and the NSDAP as the country’s economic situation worsened. Yet, even as they reported the turmoil, they optimistically assessed events and held positive views regarding the country’s prospects. Regardless of constant signs of struggle, many American observers in Germany remained convinced that stability could still be achieved and discounted the advances made by Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. In so doing, they failed to fully acknowledge the link between the deterioration of parliamentary government as the parties in the middle weakened and the growing strength, and the emerging parliamentary success, of the Nazis.
While the economic situation in Germany had been a concern for American policymakers since the end of World War I, the world financial crisis that developed after the U.S. stock market crash of 1929 reinvigorated their desire for stability. The United States hoped to ensure that several billions of dollars in long-term loans since 1924 would be repaid and that Germany would continue its reparations payments. President Herbert Hoover looked to ensure that his administration’s foreign policy remained in line with overall American desires, in particular that Germany achieve economic and political stability.

Even prior to taking office, Hoover had been approached by his advisors regarding the situation in Germany. In the late 1920s, the reports emanating from Germany had become a concern for Assistant Secretary of State William R. Castle. Castle harbored doubts about the American ambassador in Germany, Jacob Gould Schurman, whom he contended was too “pro-German,” and he advised the president-elect to replace Schurman with a businessman. Soon after Hoover took office, Castle went on to note the need for better analysis of the German situation. The president, for

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2 Herbert John Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 24 July 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11542, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


4 “Memorandum on Political Despatches,” enclosure to William R. Castle, Assistant Secretary of State, to DeWitt C. Poole, Counselor of Embassy, Berlin, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2454a, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
his part, also believed that improvements needed to be made when it came to diplomatic appointments in a broad sense. In his memoirs, Hoover suggested general dissatisfaction with American emissaries overseas, asserting that “the importance of able and experienced American diplomatic representation abroad had been neglected” following World War I. His new choice for the German ambassadorship, Frederic Sackett, fit his criteria that potential candidates be “outstanding citizens whose public service and personal distinction carried additional weight.”

A lawyer with extensive business interests in banking, real estate, and coal mining, Sackett seemed an ideal candidate to serve in Germany. During World War I, he had worked as Kentucky’s federal food administer for the U.S. Food Administration, the wartime federal agency Hoover had headed. In 1924, Sackett, running as a Republican, won election as a senator for Kentucky. Sackett’s experience in business and financial concerns, his wartime work, and his Senate service seemed to fit perfectly with Hoover’s call for outstanding men. Plus, a businessman with political experience suited well the American desire to establish a secure financial market in Germany. Frederic Sackett resigned his Senate seat in January 1930 in order to become the new U.S. ambassador to Germany.

Despite the new emphasis on quality analysis and the arrival of a new ambassador, U.S. coverage of the situation in Germany continued to suffer. American

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6 Burke, Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 10-11.
officials still believed that stability could be achieved in Germany, but reports illustrated that the German government remained in upheaval. After more than a decade of parliamentary government, forming a majority coalition seemed more difficult than ever. Throughout the first two years of the decade, U.S. diplomats noted continual attempts to reorganize the German political parties and the growing strength of two extremist parties, the German Communist Party and the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.

III

The struggles of parliamentary government in Germany had led to a dramatic rise in political extremism, and coverage of such developments dominated U.S. reports as 1930 opened. The German chancellor since June 1928, Hermann Müller, struggled to form yet another coalition. Believing Müller’s ability to solidify control to be waning, German President Paul von Hindenburg searched for participants to organize a new coalition in the first months of the new year. Germany’s economic situation had always strained Müller’s capacity to maintain a functioning coalition government, but as 1930 began, he needed to formulate a strategy to deal with the new economic situation following the impact of the American stock market crash on credit. From the start, U.S. reports provided a relatively clear account of the dire circumstances. John C. Wiley, the


chargé d’affaires ad interim, observed that Germany suffered from “unprecedented unemployment” and an “unsatisfactory economic situation,” despite “a relatively mild winter.” Beyond the sheer economic hardship, he pointed out that “extremists of the Right and Left are exploiting this unfortunate situation politically.” These difficulties would lead to the resignation of the Müller government on 27 March 1930.

While American observers generally provided an accurate picture of events on the ground, their analysis seemed to be tainted with perpetually unwarranted optimism that the extremists would be dealt with. Before being replaced, Ambassador Schurman focused on the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. Covering Hindenburg’s New Year’s Day address, he argued that the German president’s comments represented a direct challenge to the increased activity of the Nazis. Schurman summarized Hindenburg’s message to be that “if all the difficult political problems were to be solved with an eye to the welfare of the Fatherland and responsibility for its future, narrow party lines must be subordinated to the great national aims and all Germans must be consolidated in one broad united front. The Fatherland must stand above the parties. Real patriotism should mean sincere cooperation for the nation’s welfare in the present and future.” Schurman contended that Hindenburg’s comments were “particularly significant” as not only “a plea for unity” but also a reprimand of the “extremists of the Right, who . . . insist on a policy of destructive opposition under the cloak of

9 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58.

10 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 28 March 1930, 862.00/2487, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
patriotism.” But as the events of the last few months of 1929 had shown, narrow party lines had led to the split of the German National People’s Party. And the weekly American reports on the domestic political situation in Germany in January and February illustrated constant bickering within and between parties. Yet, instead of providing deeper analysis of the parliamentary struggles among the mainstream parties in Germany, which had fostered the growing extremist strength, Schurman focused narrowly on the actions of one group of extremists and whether the German government would act against them.

As the German government struggled to deal with its parliamentary troubles it became apparent that the radical parties, the German Communist Party on the left and the National Socialists on the right, were acting to assert themselves more directly into the turmoil. The disturbances proved serious enough that the Weimar Republic re-issued the Law for the Protection of the Republic. First passed in 1922 after the assassination of Walther Rathenau, the law had been intended to deter right-wing nationalists from

11 Jacob Gould Schurman to Secretary of State, 6 January 1930, 862.00PR/59, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

12 Edward Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of December 1929,” 23 December 1929, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #10564, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

13 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 22 March 1930, 862.00/2492, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
committing assassinations or other acts of terrorism. Although it had not been renewed in the summer of 1929, the increased agitation of the new year led the Reichstag to support an extension “until the enactment of the new German penal code, but not beyond December 31, 1932.” Soon after his arrival, Ambassador Frederic Sackett noted that while the intention of the law had been “to check excesses by extreme Nationalists, it has proved an effective weapon against radicals of the Left.”

The new ambassador and his staff seemed much more concerned with the efforts of the German Communists than Schurman had been. They viewed the Communists as agitators bent on causing turmoil, even if they had not yet succeeded in doing so. John Wiley thought the situation particularly dire as he believed that the weakening German government was “no longer competent as formerly to cope with the Communist menace.” Numerous reports began recording both examples of Communist activity in Germany and speculation about the party’s plans and motivations.

American officials closely monitored the actions of German Communists when the year opened, noting that the party held regular open air demonstrations and often clashed with the police or other extremist groups. Many industrial centers in Germany

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14 Political Consequences of Rathenau’s Murder, 25 July 1922, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany, 1919-1941, Report #3540, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

15 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 17 March 1930, 862.00PR/62, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

16 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58.
had banned open-air demonstrations in response, yet disturbances continued. Sackett acknowledged that while the Communists had a much larger following than other extremists, their actions had “been for the most part puerile and have caused only a temporary disturbance of the public order.” He also related that at least one editor of a German newspaper felt it “hard to believe that Bolshevism could do serious damage in Germany today,” despite the “excessive fear of Bolshevism” throughout the country.

The focus on the German Communists seemed to stem from an American fear that the Soviet Union might be directly controlling the German Communist Party. Despite reporting that German Communist organizations denied links to Moscow, Wiley speculated that Moscow directed, or at least promoted, much of the Communist agitation in Germany. According to Sackett, German public opinion was decidedly “hostile to the Soviets” due to the general belief that they were influencing the actions of the German Communist Party. And the accusations did lead to a strained relationship between Weimar and Moscow.

17 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58; John C. Wiley to Secretary of State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 25 March 1930, 862.00B/156, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

18 Sackett to State, 22 March 1930, 862.00/2492.

19 Sackett to State, 25 March 1930, 862.00B/156.

20 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58; Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145.

21 Sackett to State, 25 March 1930, 862.00B/156.

22 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 17 February 1930, 862.00PR/60, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Speculation abounded when it came to understanding the purpose of the demonstrations and other activities. Wiley transmitted that the Soviet Embassy had complained “that the present disturbances are not disproportionate to the present extent of unemployment and that Right radicalism is exploiting the situation to provoke the suppression of the German Communist Party and the alignment of Germany in an anti-Soviet front.” Yet, that possibility failed to merit any scrutiny by American officials. Wiley put forth his own conclusions, stating “my own opinion is 1) the present situation reflects the orders of Moscow, 2) that the motive is largely propagandistic.” Wiley went on to suggest that the Communists were trying to “create a stage [sic] of emergency that would provoke the President to dissolve the Reichstag and, on the basis of Article 48 of the Constitution, set up a dictatorship.” He felt that the German Communists hoped that a dictator would suspend trade unions, which would lead disenchanted workers to join the party. Wiley also passed along a theory developed by the Social Democratic Party. The German Communist Party had put some of its property up for sale and the Social Democrats believed that this illustrated that the Communists were accumulating cash should the party be outlawed and would find it necessary “to go underground.” Ambassador Sackett agreed, reporting after German Communist Party leaders admitted to selling some of the party’s property that they must be “preparing for the suppression of

23 Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145.
24 Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145.
25 Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145.
26 Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145; Sackett to State, 17 February 1930, 862.00PR/60.
their party.‖ Despite all of the conjecture, U.S. officials in Germany proved unable to arrive at an agreed upon consensus regarding the purpose of all of the Communist demonstrations.

American coverage of the National Socialists often originated from this reporting on the German Communists. When detailing Communist activity, U.S. officials noted things like, “hardly a day has passed without an encounter with the police or the National Socialists.” They also frequently covered Communist attacks on NSDAP meetings. When American diplomats expanded beyond surface coverage of the National Socialists, they frequently described the right-wing extremists and their activities in comparison to the Communists. Sackett directly compared the Nazis and their tactics to the German Communists, stating that “both stress their revolutionary character and strive openly to overthrow the existing order.” He supported his contentions by transmitting a Nationalist newspaper account, which he summarized as reporting that “not only the tactics but even the aims of the Communists are being adopted by the National Socialists who are said to regard Lenin as their ideal.” This evidence seemed dubious, though, as

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27 Sackett to State, 17 February 1930, 862.00PR/60.

28 Issues dealing with communism were collected under the designation 862.00B (with the “B” denoting “Bolshevism”) within the Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Dispatches regarding National Socialism were not collected under a single designation.

29 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58.

30 Sackett to State, 25 March 1930, 862.00B/156.

31 Sackett to State, 22 March 1930, 862.00/2492.
Sackett later acknowledged that the Nationalists were losing members to the Nazis and, thus, had definite reasons to paint the extremists in a poor light.³²

American officials recognized the antagonistic relationship between National Socialists and the German Communists. Wiley believed that the National Socialists were intentionally trying to provoke the Communists, noting that “it is undoubtedly the case that propaganda is emanating from this quarter to magnify the present danger of large scale Communist uprisings.”³³ The Communists reciprocated, and in April, Ambassador Sackett recorded a Communist slogan translated as: “Strike the ‘Nazis’ wherever you come across them!”³⁴ Their active campaign against the Nazis had really only developed in late 1929 and into early 1930 as for the first time, the Communists believed that the Nazis had become successful enough to constitute a threat.³⁵

Yet, American officials lagged behind in assessing that threat. Their surface coverage proved particularly problematic considering the fact that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party experienced some demonstrable improvements in their position in 1930 and made political gains that clearly surpassed those of the German Communist Party. While U.S. policymakers noted that the political fortunes of the NSDAP seemed to be

³² Sackett to State, 25 March 1930, 862.00B/156.

³³ Wiley’s analysis of the situation went too far; he suggested that the role played by the National Socialists “had escaped public comment.” Wiley to State, 3 February 1930, 862.00B/145.

³⁴ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 15 April 1930, 862.00B/160, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ James J. Ward, “‘Smash the Fascists…’ German Communist efforts to Counter the Nazis, 1930-1931,” Central European History 14 (Mar., 1981): 34.
improving in 1930, they failed to be very concerned about the larger ramifications of the new developments. The first evidence of a shift toward power for the National Socialists had come with the December 1929 elections for the Thuringian legislature.

The National Socialists had a long-term presence in the central German state of Thuringia. The state itself had only been formed following World War I out of a number of princely states, and the forced consolidation increased anti-republican reaction there, making it a logical National Socialist recruiting ground.\(^{36}\) By 1926, the Nazis targeted Thuringia as one of the urban areas in which they needed to expand their presence to be a successful national party.\(^{37}\) Shortly thereafter, in July 1926, the National Socialists held their annual party congress there.\(^{38}\) And once established, the party began concentrating on electoral politics and cooperation with other anti-republican groups in the state.\(^{39}\)

The Nazis proved unable to make substantial political gains the first few years, perhaps due in part to their claim that real changes could only be made after they had gained power on the national stage.\(^{40}\) In Thuringia, however, they soon benefited when the ruling coalition disintegrated in July 1929 due to political conflict and economic turmoil. In elections held in December, the Nazis won six of the fifty-three legislature

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\(^{38}\) Tracey, “The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia,” 34.


\(^{40}\) Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party*, 175.
seats with a little over 11 percent of the vote. While the total itself seemed low, the remaining seats were spread out among various parties, with none holding a majority.

This put the National Socialists into the position of joining a coalition government, and to do so, Adolf Hitler demanded that a Nazi, Wilhelm Frick, be named minister of the interior and education. Hitler personally negotiated the deal and the other parties met his demands when the new Thuringian government formed in January 1930.

Considering the Nazis had been active in the local electoral process for years, it had taken a while to achieve this success. It nevertheless marked a turning point for the heretofore fringe radical party and even American officials acknowledged that it represented quite a triumph. Wiley expressed concern regarding the potential ramifications of the Nazis’ entry into mainstream state government, given his belief “that the tactics of this party toward the Republic are not unlike those of the Communists” as the party itself “rejects the Weimar Constitution and advocates the overthrow of the government by physical force.” He also recalled that Wilhelm Frick had been convicted for his participation in the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Despite these concerns, which should have heightened American interest in the region and the party, Wiley closed his review by reassuringly pointing out that “it is of interest that Dr. Frick took the usual oath by which he promised not only to abide by but also to defend the Weimar Constitution.” Wiley, it seemed, was willing to take Frick at his word.

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42 Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 181.
43 Wiley to State, 21 January 1930, 862.00PR/58.
After noting the Nazi success in Thuringia, American officials failed to fully examine the new situation until problems developed. Upon taking his ministry post, Frick quickly undertook a “purge of liberal and republican leanings from the state’s civil service and police” and followed that with the same line of attack on the educational system. Once people holding those political leanings were eliminated, Frick planned to have Nazis or sympathizers take their places and push National Socialist ideas. At the time, U.S. reports made no note of these actions, although Sackett later acknowledged that Frick had boasted that he would “make Thuringia a reactionary stronghold.”

The lack of American reporting of events in Thuringia proved even more significant when officials failed to cover a conflict that developed between the state and the federal government. Shortly after the government formed, Frick “lifted existing restrictions on student political activity, then suspended a school official who questioned his order and refused to condone a rightist student rally.” Weimar’s Minister of the Interior Carl Severing soon grew concerned that Frick was using his position to undermine republicanism in Germany. After Frick failed to respond to Severing’s request for an explanation, Severing cut off federal payments funding the police force of Thuringia. This was a particularly strong statement, as the federal government paid 85 percent of the police budget. Bavaria, long home to calls for more state control and the

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44 Tracey, “The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia,” 43.

45 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 31 March 1930, 862.00PR/63, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

46 Tracey, “The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia,” 44.
birthplace of National Socialism, soon offered its support to Thuringia. For years, Bavaria had seemed to fight the battle over state control on its own, now it appeared that a possibility of cooperation existed among states.

American officials had sent dozens of dispatches detailing earlier conflicts between the federal government and German states dating back to the creation of the Weimar Republic, conflicts in which both Bavaria and the National Socialists had played large parts. Yet, U.S. officials failed to connect this new conflict with Thuringia to those earlier trends, and it inexplicably merited none of the attention given to the previous disagreements. Ambassador Sackett speculated that Severing hoped to force Frick’s resignation from the government but failed to look into the situation any further. The situation did not immediately escalate, as the collapse of the Müller government in March precluded Severing from pursuing the matter. It should have at least signaled an alert for U.S. officials to pay more attention to the NSDAP. Unfortunately, it did not.

The National Socialists continued to be active on the national scene as well. In March 1930, Paul von Hindenburg commended the Reichstag’s acceptance of the Young Plan and also urged a Nationalist student group to make sacrifices for the rehabilitation of Germany, actions that triggered NSDAP-led demonstrations against the president. Nazi attempts to recruit members of the Reichswehr had also led Minister of Defense Wilhelm

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47 Sackett to State, 31 March 1930, 862.00PR/63.
48 Sackett to State, 31 March 1930, 862.00PR/63.
49 Tracey, “The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia,” 44.
50 Sackett to State, 17 March 1930, 862.00PR/62.
Groener to act. In January 1930, he had warned the Reichswehr’s commanding officers via a “pastoral letter” to avoid being drawn into the political turmoil in Germany.\footnote{Jürgen Förster, “The Legacy of the First World War,” in Germany and the Second World War, Volume IX/I, German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival, ed. Jörg Echternkamp, trans. Derry Cook-Radmore, Ewald Osers, Barry Smerin, and Barbara Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 495.} In particular, he singled out the danger in taking sides with the National Socialists as he believed they held a similar goal to the Communists: the destruction of the present system of government. He urged his officers not to allow their men to be “‘dazzle[d]’” by the idea that “‘the National Socialists alone represent the truly national idea.’”\footnote{Gordon A. Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1928-1932,” Political Science Quarterly 63 (Jun., 1948): 205.} Problems continued, though, as a month later he issued a circular to members of the Reichswehr and German Navy. In it, he “promised rewards and promotions to any member reporting the names of persons engaged in subversive activity.”\footnote{Sackett to State, 17 March 1930, 862.00PR/62.} It became known as the “Watch Decree” because engraved watches were one of the rewards he proposed.\footnote{Otis C. Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 1919-1933 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 140.} In March, Sackett reported that the circular had led to the arrest of three individuals.\footnote{Sackett to State, 17 March 1930, 862.00PR/62.} All three had joined the NSDAP and two had attempted to enlist other Reichswehr officers. They would all be tried on charges of treason before the end of the year.\footnote{Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 140-41.}
In many ways, then, the first three months of 1930 represented not only continued instability but also a small degree of developing chaos. Historian Heinrich August Winkler contends that the collapse of the Müller government “mark[ed] one of the deepest ruptures in the history of the Weimar Republic” as “the dissolution of the first German democracy began.”57 American officials recognized that the German government continued to struggle and clearly understood that extreme nationalist activity had increased. Yet, despite the signs that the extreme right had begun to make inroads politically, U.S. diplomats seemed unconcerned. And as the National Socialists continued to build on their small successes of the beginning of the year, the U.S. understanding of their efforts and their successes trailed behind.

IV

Despite U.S. officials’ optimistic appraisals, the commitment to parliamentary government in Germany continued to deteriorate. Following the collapse of the Müller government on 27 March 1930, the Weimar political scene would be marked by political clashes and the meteoric rise of political extremism. American diplomats closely monitored the events that followed but failed to recognize that the political extremism of the National Socialists would quickly be translated into electoral advances.

After the Müller government resigned, American diplomats began predicting the alignment of the new coalition. Ambassador Sackett correctly foresaw that the political

57 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 434. Winkler asserts that the failure of the Müller government “would lead to a shift in power from the parliament to the president.”57
climate in Germany would lead to “a minority government of the Middle headed by the Center party” with the participation of some Nationalists. President Hindenburg acted quickly, appointing Center Party member Heinrich Brüning the new chancellor on 30 March. Brüning then formed a cabinet that included ministers from the various parties of the middle and the German National People’s Party. Notably missing from the new coalition were the Social Democrats.

In documenting Heinrich Brüning’s attempt to bring order to the government, American officials noted that the National Socialists represented a clear obstacle for the new chancellor. After Brüning submitted his economic plan to the Reichstag, Sackett focused his analysis on the proposed agricultural relief program. The ambassador believed the program to be a response to “the growing strength of the National-Socialists in Northern Germany, where agriculture is hardest hit.” Brüning had included the agricultural program to gain support from the Nationalists, whom he needed to pass his overall economic program. While one of the leaders of the Nationalists, Alfred Hugenberg, opposed working with Brüning, the agricultural program proved to be popular within the party. The Nationalists sided with the government, believing that the agricultural subsidies involved would help many of its constituents, and perhaps keep

58 Sackett tel to State, 28 March 1930, 862.00/2487.
59 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 435-36.
60 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 April 1930, 862.00/2493, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
them from turning to the NSDAP. Shortly after announcing the plan, Brüning faced a vote of confidence called by the left-wing parties in the Reichstag. The Social Democrats, Communists, and their odd partner, the National Socialists, however, did not have enough votes to counter the other political parties’ support for the chancellor and Brüning survived.

For the next couple of months, political figures in Germany attempted to organize into different party groupings in order to develop a better functioning political system. At the same time, they tried to avoid too much turmoil as they wished to avoid new Reichstag elections. Wielding the threat of dissolving the Reichstag or ruling by decree under Article 48, Brüning blamed Germany’s political parties “for the wide-spread distrust of the parliamentary system and the resultant growing of radical groups on the Right and Left” and asserted that “the abominable agitation of the Right and Left could be best combated by creating stable parliamentary conditions.”

German politicians attempted to both reorganize existing parties and create new ones. As U.S. officials monitored the situation, Sackett observed that “the parties were reluctant to enter an election in which the only gainers would be extremists of the Right and Left (particularly

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62 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 8 April 1930, 862.00/2494, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

63 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 3 April 1930, 862.00/2490, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

64 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 May 1930, 862.00PR/66, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
the National-Socialists), elements incapable of active cooperation in government.”

Many of the middle parties focused on reorganizing, in particular on consolidating the numerous parties into fewer, better functioning ones. Sackett noted that on the right, conversely, the German National People’s Party seemed to be splintering into two parties. Some members of the party opposed a particular tax measure proposed by Brüning, but others moved to vote with the government.

Even with the new government coalition, the extremist parties continued to agitate, and despite reports of cooperation, conflict between Nazis and Communists continued. Sackett reported numerous violent disturbances between the two parties throughout the country. At times, the coverage still tended to suggest that the Communists were more to blame. John E. Kehl, the American consul general in Hamburg, provided a detailed description of a large clash between the two forces at a National Socialist meeting at the end of May. He titled his dispatch: “Communist

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65 Sackett to State, 8 April 1930, 862.00/2494.

66 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 28 April 1930, 862.00PR/65, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

67 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 14 April 1930, 862.00PR/64, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

68 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 21 May 1930, 862.00B/171, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 28 May 1930, 862.00B/172, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 June 1930, 862.00B/173, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Terrorism in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{69} This incident contradicted Sackett’s earlier claims that since both parties aimed to overthrow Weimar, “an era of reciprocal toleration” had begun in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{70}

Regardless of the true relationship between the German Communist Party and the NSDAP, the constant conflict among extremist elements led many in Germany to call for a ban of paramilitary organizations.\textsuperscript{71} While the push for a ban at the federal level stalled, Bavaria banned the wearing of uniforms during open-air meetings, which George A. Gordon believed “seriously handicapped” the National Socialist ability to agitate and attack the state government. Prussia took a different approach, hoping to decrease tension by ensuring speedy trials of those arrested during the clashes, but Gordon doubted that this measure would prove effective.\textsuperscript{72} Gordon’s speculation proved correct when in June, Prussia specifically banned “the wearing of National Socialist uniforms and insignia.” The free state of Baden followed Prussia’s lead in only targeting the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{73} By July, the Prussian government took a further step, making it illegal for officials and civil servants to be members of either the NSDAP or the German

\textsuperscript{69} John E. Kehl, American Consul General, Hamburg to Secretary of State, 10 June 1930, 862.00B/174, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{70} Sackett to State, 21 May 1930, 862.00B/171.

\textsuperscript{71} Sackett to State, 3 June 1930, 862.00B/173.

\textsuperscript{72} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 10 June 1930, 862.00PR/68, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{73} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 23 June 1930, 862.00PR/69, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Communist Party. The Prussians argued that “membership in a political party whose chief aim is to overthrow the Republic is inconsistent with the oath of officials to observe and defend the Constitution.” Again, Baden followed the lead of the largest German state.74

The evidence presented in American reports illustrated quite an active National Socialist movement. While its measurable political successes remained minor, the party left for dead after the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch had not only survived but was beginning to build itself into a national force by 1930. Yet American officials still failed to view it as a legitimate political party. Sackett believed that Prussia’s efforts created “a welcome opportunity to strike a blow to political extremism without creating martyrs.”75 Thus, despite their achievements, American officials viewed the Nazis as nothing more than an extremist group causing problems for the legitimate political parties in Germany.

Clearly, the first half of 1930 witnessed the NSDAP’s success taking center stage as the extremist party most likely to achieve added visibility. Wilhelm Frick continued to hold a ministerial post in Thuringia, Carl Severing’s initial concerns regarding his use of that post for National Socialist indoctrination having come to naught because of the fall of the Müller government. Minister of the interior for Heinrich Brüning’s cabinet, the former chancellor Dr. Joseph Wirth, took the word of the Thuringian government that

74 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 8 July 1930, 862.00PR/71, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

75 Sackett to State, 8 July 1930, 862.00PR/71.
National Socialists were not acting as police officers.⁷⁶ Yet Wirth’s confidence would soon be tested when Frick began appointing National Socialist police commissioners and “issued school prayers with anti-Republican tendencies.”⁷⁷

Additionally, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists had used their presence in Thuringia to extend their influence into the bordering state of Saxony. In this eastern German state, the Nazis had worked with their Social Democratic and Communist enemies to encourage the dissolution of the Saxon legislature. The new elections were scheduled for the end of June.⁷⁸ After a successful campaign, the Nazis increased from 5 seats to 14 in the 106 seat Diet. Thereafter, they trailed only the Social Democrats, who held 32 seats, whereas prior to the elections, they were tied for the sixth largest party in the state.⁷⁹ Sackett showed concern regarding the results, suggesting that the Saxon elections illustrated the growing electoral aggression of the Nazis, who had gained over 240,000 votes since the 1929 elections. The ambassador believed that these results “have

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⁷⁶ Sackett to State, 28 April 1930, 862.00PR/65.

⁷⁷ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 26 May 1930, 862.00PR/67, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The tension between Thuringia and the Weimar government would not be resolved until after the National Socialists became the second largest party in the Reichstag. And then in April 1931, the Thuringian government fully resolved the situation by forcing Frick to step down from his post. See, George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 30 December 1930, 862.00PR/83, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 8 April 1931, 862.00/2588, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 8 April 1931, 862.00PR/80, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Sackett to State, 26 May 1930, 862.00PR/67.

⁷⁹ Sackett to State, 23 June 1930, 862.00PR/69.
demonstrated anew to all the moderate parties the very certain danger of holding new national elections at the present time.”\(^{80}\) For Sackett, the continued Nazi success merited not a reevaluation of the party, but instead a general admonition not to hold elections. Yet even American diplomats outside of Germany indicated that the growing strength of the Nazis caused foreigners to be concerned. Reporting from Brussels, Hugh Gibson, the American ambassador to Belgium, suggested that the Saxon elections had caused “uneasiness” about the Nazis’ “growing power.”\(^{81}\)

Meanwhile, Heinrich Brüning still struggled to win Reichstag approval of his economic program even though President Hindenburg had warned that the bill’s failure would mean dissolution of the legislature.\(^{82}\) In July, Brüning proved unable to marshal the support necessary to pass the budget, which included raising tax rates to deal with a projected deficit.\(^{83}\) The chancellor needed the support of the German National People’s Party, but the majority voted against the measure.\(^{84}\) Thus, Brüning dissolved the Reichstag on 18 July, with new elections scheduled for 14 September. Once the

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\(^{80}\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 24 June 1930, 862.00/2501, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{81}\) Hugh Gibson to Secretary of State, 26 June 1930, 862.00/2502, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{82}\) Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West*, 436.

\(^{83}\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 22 July 1930, 862.032/17, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{84}\) Patch, *Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic*, 93.
Reichstag dissolved, Brüning ruled by decree under the provisions of Article 48. One of his first acts included an order instituting the budget bill.85

Ambassador Sackett had already suggested to the State Department that an election would be dangerous. After the Reichstag adjourned, he warned that this did not bode well for Germany. The ambassador predicted that the nation’s economic difficulties would lead to losses for the parties in the middle of the political spectrum and gains for the political extremists on the ends, which had occurred in recent local elections. And despite his disdain for the National Socialists, he conveyed the general belief that they were “expected to make considerable gains.” Sackett seemed unsure how a new coalition could be formed considering that the National Socialists, the Communists, and a faction of the German National People’s Party led by Alfred Hugenberg were all hostile to the government and would not work with it.86

The weeks preceding the election further illustrated the American ability to report on events but not fully analyze their significance. And in some ways the election did not seem to be a priority for the United States. As it neared, the number of American dispatches detailing the events in Germany actually declined. Ambassador Sackett noted that most of the German political parties campaigned on the idea of “opposition to socialism and radicalism, i.e., to the Social Democrats, Communists, and National Socialists.” After summarizing the platforms of the numerous parties, the ambassador

85 Frederic Sackett to Secretary of State, 30 July 1930, 862.00PR/72, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

86 Sackett to State, 22 July 1930, 862.032/17.
relayed four possible combinations being discussed for the cabinet that would form following the election: a “Red majority” of Communists and Social Democrats; a “revival” of the Weimar Coalition; a “Grand Coalition” that added the People’s Party to the Weimar Coalition; and a “Brüning majority” that included a variety of centrist to right-leaning parties.87

American diplomats had spent the bulk of the year detailing the activities of political extremists throughout Germany. They had also described a steady stream of small electoral successes for the National Socialists and a definite shift of support to extremist parties in general. Soon after the dissolution of the Reichstag, Sackett reported that Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists had begun to “point out in public speech that their goal is the overthrow of the present order in Germany by ‘lawful means’ only.”88 Yet, he provided no additional information or analysis of what this meant for Germany and then failed to examine further the motivations and actions of the Nazis in the months prior to the election.89 The ambassador spent the weeks prior to the election vacationing in Prussia and sailed home to the United States on the actual day of the vote.90

87 Frederic Sackett to Secretary of State, 27 August 1930, 862.00PR/74, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

88 Sackett to State, 30 July 1930, 862.00PR/72.

89 U.S. reports did not detail the National Socialist campaign until after the party’s resounding electoral victory. See George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 23 September 1930, 862.00/2533, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

90 Burke, Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 68-74.
the trends and challenges of the previous year, U.S. diplomats seemed totally unprepared for the results of the September Reichstag elections.

With a turnout of 82 percent of the voting public, the September elections proved that the German public had become captivated by the extremist parties, as the only two parties to make significant gains were the Communists and the National Socialists.91 Edward Carpenter, the U.S. military attaché, asserted that “the people wanted to see something happen and as the Communists promised to ruin the country from the one end and the Fascists from the other, they received the votes of those who are not satisfied with the present order of things.”92 While most observers had expected some gains for the radical right, the election resulted in the monumental growth of the Nazis, turning the German political situation upside down.93 Friedrich W. von Prittwitz und Gaffron, the German ambassador to the United States, expressed surprise at the severity of the “swing to radicalism” in talks with Secretary of State Henry Stimson.94 Telegrams and dispatches began pouring in as the situation took shape. The day following the election, George Gordon, the counselor of the embassy who was acting as the American chargé

91 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 437. For the official results, see George A. Gordon tel to Secretary of State, 14 October 1930, 862.00/2551, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

92 Edward Carpenter, “The Political Situation in Germany,” 25 September 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11062, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


94 Henry L. Stimson memorandum, 27 October 1930, 862.00/2554, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
d’affaires ad interim, noted the high turnout and suggested his “first outstanding impression is that disgust and recklessness were predominant in the election as shown by [the] enormous increase in [the] Hitlerite and Communistic vote.” Gordon also claimed that “the extent of this gain was a tremendous surprise to everyone, including probably to the National Socialists themselves.”

The American analysis of the results emphasized two themes. First, officials asserted that National Socialist success had stemmed from Germany’s economic and political troubles. Edward Carpenter argued that the “adverse economic conditions” had made it clear even prior to the elections that the radical ends of the spectrum would gain votes. George Gordon also stressed the role of economic factors, particularly the high level of unemployment in Germany and the government’s inability to deal with its “chronic budgetary deficit.” He also pointed out that republican institutions in Germany had faced “precarious” situations time and time again over the past decade, in part because supporters of the Republic had allowed their “personal and doctrinal

95 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 15 September 1930, 862.00/2509, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

96 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 17 September 1930, 862.00/2518, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

97 Carpenter, “The Political Situation in Germany,” 25 September 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11062.

98 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 17 September 1930, 862.00/2519, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
differences” to get in the way of cooperation and putting the interests of the country first.\textsuperscript{99}

The second theme was a mixture of surprise and disdain regarding the results. Gordon believed that Germans were being reckless as they “support[ed] a party of irresponsible leaders and promises.”\textsuperscript{100} He later contended that the results illustrated a “dangerous mentality” that had led to a “body-blow” against the republican form of government. Gordon believed that should strong moderate leaders develop, the National Socialists’ gains would be diminished.\textsuperscript{101} Edward Carpenter shared some of these sentiments, asserting that the gains of the National Socialists represented “the big surprise” of the elections and that the success of the extremist parties meant that “the numbers remaining who are able and willing to do constructive work are perhaps too small.”\textsuperscript{102}

For the first time since the early 1920s, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists became the central focus of extended analysis by the American diplomatic corps. Gordon remained at the center of the analysis.\textsuperscript{103} Within days of the election, he summarized his thoughts on the party, noting that it was necessary “again to emphasize the

\textsuperscript{99} Gordon to State, 17 September 1930, 862.00/2518.

\textsuperscript{100} Gordon to State, 15 September 1930, 862.00/2509.

\textsuperscript{101} Gordon to State, 17 September 1930, 862.00/2518.

\textsuperscript{102} Carpenter, “The Political Situation in Germany,” 25 September 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11062.

\textsuperscript{103} Ambassador Sackett, who was campaigning in Kentucky for a Senate candidate, inquired about returning to his post. He did not return early though as the State Department began forwarding Gordon’s reports. Burke, \textit{Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic}, 75.
extraordinarily confused, self-contradictory and opportunist character of their campaign.” They shrewdly used different messages for different groups but simultaneously held tight to their anti-Semitic beliefs and criticized the Treaty of Versailles and the Young Plan while calling for the creation of a dictatorship.104

As George Gordon closely monitored the National Socialists in the weeks that followed the election, he made clear that he discounted the Nazi commitment to parliamentary government and saw the National Socialists as mere opportunists taking advantage of Germany’s difficult conditions. On 19 September, Gordon met with a Nazi, the Berlin representative of the Völkische Beobachter, who painted the Nazis as a bulwark against communism and insisted that they eschewed “violent and illegal measures.” Yet Gordon rejected such claims and argued instead that the Nazis had no real program and acted out of “sheer opportunism.”105 Gordon seemed to see all NSDAP actions as opportunistic moves to gain a power position. Shortly after the election, he cited a speech by Hitler as another example, reporting that Hitler called for and promised that his party would push for change “through legal and constitutional means.” Gordon traced this shift not to the party’s real beliefs but rather to its conclusion that despite recent NSDAP electoral success, it was not able to immediately take control of the German government. Gordon believed that pledges to respect the constitution were a

104 Gordon to State, 17 September 1930, 862.00/2518.

105 Gordon also noted that “for the sake of brevity,” the National Socialist Party “will henceforth be referred to by its local appellation of ‘Nazi.’” George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 19 September 1930, 862.00/2530, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
tactical ploy meant “to allay suspicion” until the opportunistic Nazis could figure out a different way to destroy the government.\textsuperscript{106}

A trial of the \textit{Reichswehr} officers arrested in March under the terms of Groener’s “Watch Decree” further thrust Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists into the public arena. In the fall of 1930, three \textit{Reichswehr} officers had been charged with treason for trying to “form National Socialist ‘cells’” within the army to make it neutral should the Nazis undertake a putsch.\textsuperscript{107} Hitler testified for the defense, but used the trial to calm German fears about the future plans of the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{108} Gordon quoted Hitler as saying that the party was “‘convinced that when an idea is sound, it will conquer the State by itself. The only thing amiss is that at present thirty million Germans do not yet know what we want’” because the party had been restricted from fully broadcasting its message. Gordon asserted that Hitler just used the opportunity to publicize the propaganda of the NSDAP and in general “tone down” the rhetoric of the party. The most controversial part of his testimony stemmed from his assertion that when the party gained power, a court would be established to try the “‘November criminals of 1918’” and that then “‘heads will roll in the sand.’”\textsuperscript{109} Hitler’s testimony failed to lead to an

\textsuperscript{106} Gordon to State, 23 September 1930, 862.00/2533.

\textsuperscript{107} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 25 September 1930, 862.00PR/76, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{108} Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 141.

\textsuperscript{109} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 1 October 1930, 862.00/2542, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
acquittal; the officers were sentenced to eighteen months in prison.\footnote{Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism,” 207.} Hitler had used the opportunity, however, to keep the NSDAP in the center of Weimar’s political turmoil.

Gordon also forwarded an article published in September in *Der Deutsche Volkswirt* titled “The National Socialist Economic Program,” that took a critical look at the history of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party and its Twenty-Five Point Program of 1920. Gordon believed the article demonstrated “the opportunistic variations and modifications to this half-baked program.”\footnote{George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 7 October 1930, 862.00/2549, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} Robert Murphy had already sent a copy of the program and analyzed its points to the State Department back in 1923.\footnote{See coverage of this in Chapter 2.} Much like Murphy, Gordon believed that it had a definite appeal to the German people. “The idea of breaking down everything and then building it up differently,” he noted, was “an attractive program for dissatisfied people.” Yet, the chargé d’affaires ad interim questioned the Nazi commitment to the plan, contending that “it is obvious that the National Socialists today can not and do not intend to stand on this antiquated program.”\footnote{Gordon to State, 7 October 1930, 862.00/2549.} Yet, in part, that was exactly what the Nazis planned to do.
Despite the success of the NSDAP, U.S. officials still seemed convinced that Hitler and the Nazis were unlikely to be included in a coalition government.\textsuperscript{114} Joseph Wirth of the Center Party confirmed this view by describing any potential coalition with the Nazis as “‗indiscussible.‘”\textsuperscript{115} Gordon, however, worried that the other political parties had “not yet learned their lesson” and were “jockeying, bickering, and bargaining” with each other instead of trying to save republican government in Germany.\textsuperscript{116} And Edward Carpenter did warn that a coalition from the Center Party all the way to the National Socialists “loom[ed] up as the big danger for Germany.”\textsuperscript{117} In short, the election results had been a shock to American officials, who scrambled to understand the electoral success of a party that most of them had viewed as little more than a group of extremists bent on causing problems. At long last the National Socialist German Workers’ Party had finally gotten the full attention of American diplomats.

\textsuperscript{114} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 24 September 1930, 862.00/2534, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{115} Gordon to State, 25 September 1930, 862.00PR/76.

\textsuperscript{116} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 25 September 1930, 862.00/2532, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{117} Carpenter, “Summary of the Recent Situation in Germany,” 25 September 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11062.
In the weeks and months that followed the election, attempts to understand the National Socialist success continued even as Heinrich Brüning published his proposed financial program as the new Reichstag convened. The Reichstag had been dissolved back in July due to Brüning’s inability to get support for his program. Now, in a 577 seat Reichstag, a total of 184 seats were held by Communists and National Socialists who were unwilling to cooperate on any terms acceptable to the other parties represented in the legislative body.\textsuperscript{118} And both parties had already announced their opposition to the new financial plan. Gordon wondered whether the use of Article 48 to rule by decree would again be necessary.\textsuperscript{119}

As had been the case during the election, Gordon continued to be the main American official to document the actions of the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{120} In his initial telegram covering the opening session of the Reichstag, he reported that the “Hitlerites defiantly appeared in the uniform of brown shirts without coats,” but recorded that there were no problems.\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Pollock, “The German Reichstag Elections of 1930,” 991.
\item \textsuperscript{119} George A. Gordon tel to Secretary of State, 6 October 1930, 862.00/2536, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ambassador Sackett did not return to Germany until 31 October 1930. Burke, \textit{Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic}, 98.
\item \textsuperscript{121} George A. Gordon tel to Secretary of State, 13 October 1930, 862.00/2545, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\end{itemize}
which he claimed that it revealed “an astounding lack of dignity.” Much of his disgust centered on the clothing worn by the National Socialists, who “presented the appearance of an over-grown troop of boy scouts.” Again he described the brown shirts with no coats, but added that they wore “swastika armlet[s]” and “a simulacrum of golf trousers as a crowning touch.” Gordon noted they marched to their seats and then asserted that “a certain amount of shamefaced embarrassment could be detected” when even the Communists came in “clad in conventional clothes.”

Military attaché Edward Carpenter felt the opening meeting “resembled more a vaudeville show than a law making body” and cited the Nazis in their “Fascisti uniform” and red shirt-wearing Communists. Gordon, however, had made it a point in his dispatch to note that while the Communists had threatened to wear red shirts, they had not, with the exception of the “vivid scarlet blouse of a woman deputy.” Gordon had actually attended the opening of the Reichstag, whereas military intelligence seemed to be reporting information without fully verifying it first.

Gordon also detailed, but did not analyze the reason behind, the violence against Jews that occurred the day the Reichstag opened. Gordon initially reported that there had been some property damage to Jewish stores, although he doubted the destruction had

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122 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 15 October 1930, 862.00/2552, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

123 Edward Carpenter, “Summary of the Recent Situation in Germany,” 2 December 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11168, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

124 Gordon to State, 15 October 1930, 862.00/2552.
“assumed serious proportions.” In that report he did not assign responsibility to any one group. In a follow-up dispatch, Gordon delved further into the issue of street disorders. While he had seen few disturbances on his walk to and from the Reichstag building, upon returning to the U.S. Embassy, he learned that numerous problems had arisen during and after the Reichstag session. Young men, and some women, wielding stones had broken the windows of several stores “all of which were Jewish-owned.” Police reports and witness testimony agreed that the roving bands “had a decidedly preponderant Nazi composition.” Yet, Gordon seemed to downplay the role of the Nazis and the seriousness of the events. He claimed that “a substantial percentage of the rabble consisted of recognized Communists” and that the events were “comparatively mild” considering only one hundred arrests had been made. Due to the economic situation in Germany, Gordon did encourage the State Department to be aware that events like these, or even more serious ones, would probably continue. Significantly, he did not directly link the events to the anti-Semitism of the National Socialist movement.

The real focus of American officials remained documenting the maneuvering Heinrich Brüning undertook to form a new government. While Ambassador Sackett believed Brüning had numerous shortcomings, he believed no other German statesman had the standing to replace him. Prior to the opening of the Reichstag, Brüning had

125 Gordon tel to State, 13 October 1930, 862.00/2545.

126 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 14 October 1930, 862.00/2553, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

127 Burke, Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 99.
met with party leaders, including Hitler, to try to get support for his financial program and organize a new cabinet.\(^{128}\) Gordon reported that Hitler demanded two ministries in order to participate in the government with Brüning, a demand Brüning refused.\(^{129}\) These consultations only confirmed that the chancellor would not have the support of the Nazis, the Hugenberg Nationalists, or the Communists. Gordon speculated that the overall lack of support for the government could lead to an adjournment of the Reichstag to allow Brüning to rule by decree without raising the specter of another round of elections.\(^{130}\)

Once the Reichstag opened, Brüning urged the delegates to act on his financial program as the situation in Germany remained critical and the world continued to be in an economic crisis.\(^{131}\) It soon became apparent that the Brüning cabinet would be unable to work with the Reichstag, and in December, much as Gordon predicted, the chancellor began taking the steps necessary to adjourn the Reichstag.\(^{132}\) While Ambassador Sackett

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\(^{128}\) Gordon tel to State, 6 October 1930, 862.00/2536.

\(^{129}\) George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 8 October 1930, 862.00PR/77, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{130}\) George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 9 October 1930, 862.00/2547, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{131}\) George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 23 October 1930, 862.00/2555, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{132}\) Carpenter, “Summary of the Recent Situation in Germany,” 2 December 1930, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11168.
adamantly insisted that the National Socialists should play no role in the cabinet, he also feared the establishment of a Brüning dictatorship under Article 48.\textsuperscript{133}

As 1930 ended, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists continued to increase their visibility and merit the attention of American officials as they made gains in local elections throughout the second half of November. As had been the case earlier, the elections resulted in “extremist gains” with the Nazis making more headway than the Communists. Sackett asserted that the Nazi success at the local level showed “that the tide of Hitlerism not only has not yet spent itself but is still in full flow.”\textsuperscript{134} And he seemed disappointed. The ambassador believed that the low turnout for the mid-November elections and the votes for the Nazis illustrated “the complete apathy of the voters.”\textsuperscript{135} The late November elections showed much the same trend with Nazi gains.\textsuperscript{136} Sackett credited Brüning’s government with having done good things and feared that, should the Reichstag be dissolved again, any elections would not bode well for Germany, as “Hitler’s lieutenants” had “been able to cleverly exploit local causes of unrest and discontent.”\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{133} Burke, Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 100.

\textsuperscript{134} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 December 1930, 862.00/2569, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{135} Sackett to State, 19 November 1930, 862.00PR/80.

\textsuperscript{136} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 December 1930, 862.00PR/81, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{137} Sackett to State, 3 December 1930, 862.00/2569.
The general view emanating from the American Embassy remained that the National Socialists were opportunists using Germany’s economic and political turmoil to vault themselves into prominence. Sackett reported that the National Socialists continued to instigate serious disturbances causing destruction and injury and were not likely to halt such efforts any time soon.  

Minus the violence, the Nazis followed much the same approach in the Reichstag. The ambassador argued that the Nazi delegates continued to cause problems as they were “more prone to agitation than to serious work.” But Sackett, who had been reading Mein Kampf, also exhibited a growing understanding that “Hitler remain[ed] a factor to be reckoned with.” He believed that Hitler was the only leader other than Hindenburg who could “lay claim to broad, though by no means universal, popularity.” And as 1931 opened, Sackett contended that “the ‘flash-in-the-pan’ theory with which . . . the other parties sought to explain away the Nazi success, has now been pretty generally abandoned.”

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138 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 9 December 1930, 862.00/2571, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

139 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 17 December 1930, 862.00/2573, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

140 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 6 January 1931, 862.00/2576, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
As the new year began, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists continued to dominate U.S. diplomatic reports. American officials had ended the previous year acknowledging not only that the Nazis had achieved some success but that they might have some staying power. This shift in thinking led to closer monitoring of the actions of both the party and its leader, Adolf Hitler. But a major tactical move by the Nazis in the first part of the year, a walkout from the Reichstag, seemed to backfire. The fallout led American officials to once again underestimate what the National Socialists were capable of achieving.

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists moved quickly to capitalize on their position in the government. When the Reichstag session began in February, the party introduced a series of motions, including one to dissolve the Reichstag and another expressing a lack of confidence in Brüning, meant to bring the legislative body to standstill.141 These were exactly the kinds of motions that Brüning hoped to prevent through proposed alterations in the Reichstag by-laws that would make the body function more efficiently and effectively along the lines of the British Parliament and presumably make it easier to get his economic program approved.142 The new by-laws would make it

141 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 February 1931, 862.00PR/86, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

142 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 February 1931, 862.00/2581, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
more difficult for opposition parties to issue motions proclaiming a lack of confidence in the government and would not allow motions to include “expressions insulting the Government, its members or other persons.” The National Socialists viewed the new by-laws as an attempt to concentrate more power in the hands of the chancellor. When it became apparent that Brüning had the votes necessary to pass them, the Nazis joined the Hugenberg Nationalists and the Communists in walking out en mass from the Reichstag prior to the vote. Sackett immediately blasted the “subversive and irresponsible Nazi tactics,” but also warned that the party would find that a “retreat would be necessary.”

Almost immediately, American officials reported that the exodus from the Reichstag had actually strengthened the remaining parties. Without the obstructionism of the Nazis, the legislative body approved Brüning’s economic program. Sackett believed that the Nazis had not only failed to achieve their goal in the walkout but had also committed a “serious political blunder.” Not only had the Nazis failed their constituents by not using their delegation to shape legislation before the Reichstag but they had not used their time away to present “a definite alternative course” either. The

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143 Sackett to State, 12 February 1931, 862.00PR/86.
144 Sackett to State, 12 February 1931, 862.00/2581.
145 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 25 February 1931, 862.00PR/87, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
146 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 145-47.
147 Sackett to State, 25 February 1931, 862.00PR/87.
ambassador seemed unable to fathom that the party’s very visible exodus and the agitation that followed would have any appeal to the people of Germany.

The Reichstag did not remain in session for long. At the end of March, it adjourned for almost seven months.\(^{148}\) Since the Reichstag would not reconvene until 13 October 1931, American officials had ample opportunity during the intervening months to fully evaluate the standing of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. Military Attaché Edward Carpenter continued to dismiss the party’s potential as a whole, contending that the Nazis had entered the Reichstag acting “like circus clowns and walked out a few months later like spoiled children.”\(^{149}\) George Gordon took the walkout more seriously. The exodus itself might have been a failure, Gordon conceded, but he predicted that it represented the “first wave of the Nazi offensive.” The party had been “feverishly active in the countryside,” he intoned, and that a second offensive “may soon follow.”\(^{150}\)

While the walkout of the National Socialists had allowed Chancellor Brüning to get his legislation approved, he understood the growing discontent in the country. Once the Reichstag adjourned, the Brüning government issued a series of decrees, including

\(^{148}\) The Social Democrats requested a session be held in June, but Brüning denied their appeal. Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 146-47.

\(^{149}\) Edward Carpenter, “Present Situation in the National Socialist Party,” 9 April 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11365, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{150}\) George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 31 March 1931, 862.032/19, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
one that “suspend[ed] certain Constitutional guarantees.”\footnote{George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 1 April 1931, 862.00/2587, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} In particular, the emergency decree increased the power of the police throughout Germany to forbid political groups from wearing uniforms and to ban certain rallies.\footnote{Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic}, 147.} While many of these steps had already been taken at the state level, George Gordon called “unique” the fact that the federal government would now be involved in enforcement. He also found it ironic that the measure, which limited constitutional guarantees, had the support of defenders of republican government, while the “sworn enemies of Democracy and parliamentary government . . . bitterly opposed” it.\footnote{Gordon to State, 1 April 1931, 862.00/2587.}

Due to these developments, some American officials did become concerned about the shift away from republican government in Germany, although their apprehension also showed misplaced fears. Herbert John Burgman, operating out of the military attaché’s office, meticulously detailed the political situation in the summer of 1931. As part of his analysis, he contended that the multitude of problems facing Germany would ultimately preclude a dictator from having any success in running the country. And if a dictator did come to power, Burgman warned that communism would triumph.\footnote{Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 24 July 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11542.} But the focus of embassy officials remained Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists.
Following the walkout from the Reichstag, both Sackett and Gordon observed that the National Socialists seemed to be undergoing a major tactical shift. After the emergency police decree, Gordon pointed out that Hitler had begun encouraging his party to observe the new rules, stressing that the party would achieve its aims legally.\textsuperscript{155} Gordon seemed to take at face value Hitler’s statements encouraging his party to work within the Weimar system. Hitler “seem[ed] to have been developing an absolute passion for legality and constitutionality as the watchwords of his party policy,” Gordon optimistically reported. “It may well be that the Government may henceforth find it easier to deal with the Nazis.”\textsuperscript{156} This shift, however, had resulted in some conflict with the party. Sackett noted that one disaffected Nazi had begun publishing articles suggesting that Hitler had “trusted adjutants” who were homosexuals.\textsuperscript{157} Gordon, too, believed that the new stress on legality had created “a house divided against itself.”\textsuperscript{158} Yet, American officials had begun to understand that the central figure for the NSDAP remained Adolf Hitler. Even as Gordon covered the party’s internal struggles, he reported that “Hitler remains solidly in control of the party organization.”\textsuperscript{159} As the

\textsuperscript{155} Gordon to State, 1 April 1931, 862.00/2587.

\textsuperscript{156} Gordon to State, 8 April 1931, 862.00/2588.

\textsuperscript{157} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 14 April 1931, 862.00/2589, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{158} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 8 April 1931, 862.00PR/90, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{159} Gordon to State, 8 April 1931, 862.00/2588.
Nazis began focusing on legal activity, the attention of U.S. officials finally centered directly on Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.

VII

Throughout the early 1920s, American officials in Germany had spent countless hours monitoring the creation of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party and its growth under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. Truman Smith had personally interviewed Hitler, and Robert Murphy had analyzed the party’s message, as the State Department closely monitored the extremist party during the infancy of the Weimar Republic. But after the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, the party and its leader had been dismissed as political lightweights at best. Over the decade, however, the party had not only rebuilt itself but also altered its approach to competing for support within the German populace. While American officials documented those changes and noted growing support for the Nazis as Germany’s economic situation deteriorated, they failed to reevaluate the party itself until after the 1930 Reichstag elections. In plain sight, without altering their message, and to the surprise of many, Hitler and the National Socialists had gone from a small, ineffective party to the second largest party in the country.

Following the elections, U.S. diplomats struggled to understand the party and the reasons for its success. They proved unwilling to fully concede that Hitler and the National Socialists would be effective participants in the government, especially after the party walked out of the Reichstag en masse in February 1931. Yet, by the summer of 1931, they had resigned themselves to the necessity of closely monitoring the party. This
shift coincided with a change in both Nazi tactics and the approach taken by the Brüning government. Publicly, the National Socialists touted plans to augment their power through legal and constitutional means. At the same time, Chancellor Brüning became more dependent on issuing emergency decrees under the powers described in Article 48.
Chapter 6

Forced Reevaluation: Nazi Success Leads U.S. Officials to Reconsider the Party

Although American officials continued to harbor doubts about Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, they shifted their overall appraisal of the leader and his party during the second half of 1931 and into the following year. While still believing that the National Socialists lacked a legitimate political program and that Hitler would find it difficult to participate with any other party in a ruling coalition, U.S. diplomats realized that the Nazis had proven that they were a factor, and would continue to be a factor, in German political affairs. Their task proved to be determining how much of a factor the NSDAP would be.

For the first time since the early 1920s, U.S. diplomats devoted large sections of their dispatches to an attempted analysis of the party’s ideas, popularity, and impact on the German government. Unable to fully discern the reasons behind the National Socialist success, U.S. policymakers had finally realized the necessity of trying to move beyond simply monitoring Nazi actions during this tense period of German history.

Following their electoral success of the early 1930s, the National Socialists merited the close attention of U.S. diplomats. Initially, most embassy reports continued the typical coverage of prior years by focusing on Nazi demonstrations or describing the
party’s electoral gains. After the surge in support for the Nazis in the early 1930s, not only did the number of dispatches on the NSDAP increase but a growing sense developed among American officials that they needed to discern the reasons behind the party’s success. Initially, the shift in coverage seemed to stem principally from the actions of the American Embassy in Berlin. More detailed reports resulted from the attendance of Ambassador Frederic Sackett and embassy staff members at luncheons and dinners at which representatives of the Nazi Party were present. The shift soon pervaded multiple levels of the diplomatic service as Washington-based members of the State Department, including Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, became more involved in attempting to understand the actions of the party as well.

Seemingly against the odds, the party left for dead after the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 had not only survived the intervening years but now found itself poised to play a major role in the German government. Much of the American reporting still noted mistakes of the party and its leader, as well as criticisms of the party’s political program. But the coverage also documented the Nazis’ ability to successfully end their ineffective walkout from the Reichstag, to continue to do well in local elections, and even propel Adolf Hitler to the second round of voting in the presidential election of 1932. Lingering questions regarding the experience and program of the National Socialists notwithstanding, American diplomats had begun to acknowledge that the party needed to be reckoned with.
As had often been the case during the 1920s, the world economic situation persistently affected events in Germany in the early 1930s. Financial stability had long been elusive in Germany, and as the depression continued, the country struggled to find answers to its budgetary problems. Once taking office in March 1930, Chancellor Heinrich Brüning began a long-term struggle to deal with an inherited budget deficit. While President Paul von Hindenburg had approved the use of emergency decrees, the deficits proved to be persistent as they stemmed in part from lower tax revenues and increased welfare expenditures as unemployment increased.\(^1\) American diplomats had faithfully tracked the economic situation since stability in Germany seemed so closely linked to its financial standing. By 1929, they became aware that Germany’s exports had begun to decline.\(^2\) Foreign investment decreased as investors had become concerned about Germany’s ability to pay reparations and loans.\(^3\) Additionally, the rise of political extremism seemed linked to the worsening economy and the increased levels of unemployment in the country. In mid-1929, about 1.5 million Germans were unemployed. By mid-1930 it was 3 million and that number doubled to 6 million by the


beginning of 1932.\(^4\) By 1931 a dire state of affairs existed not just in Germany but throughout Europe as well, and President Herbert Hoover attempted to step into the breach.

Germany’s economic situation began worsening as the summer of 1931 approached. In the middle of the developing turmoil, Ambassador Frederic Sackett made plans for a vacation in the United States. Hearing of his pending departure, Chancellor Heinrich Brüning requested and received a meeting with the ambassador. Shortly before Sackett set sail, Brüning stressed Germany’s serious economic and political problems. Upon his arrival in Washington, Sackett met with President Hoover and Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson in separate meetings to brief them on the grim situation.\(^5\) In his memoirs, Hoover related that Sackett relayed Brüning’s opinion of the developing financial crisis, as well as the “danger” the Communists and Nazis represented to republican government. While Sackett conveyed the seriousness of the situation, Hoover also noted that the ambassador did not believe there would be any real problems until fall.\(^6\) Thus, Hoover did not act immediately, but rather spent the days that followed discussing the situation with members of the State Department.\(^7\) Sackett’s estimate,

\(^4\) Balderston, Economics and Politics in the Weimar Republic, 79.


\(^7\) Joan Hoff Wilson, American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920-1933 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1971), 136-37.
however, proved to be extremely optimistic, as the financial situation began deteriorating within days, triggered by the 11 May declaration of bankruptcy of the Creditanstalt, Austria’s largest bank.\textsuperscript{8} Forced therefore to act more quickly on Sackett’s information, over the next month, Hoover drafted a plan for a moratorium on war debts in the hope that it would stabilize the financial system in Germany.\textsuperscript{9}

While Hoover believed that the situation required action, he suffered from doubts and opposition that would have to be overcome. Initially, Hoover turned to the State and Treasury departments to draft a plan that would “reliev[e] the pressure” on Europe by adjusting reparations and war debt payments. When they could devise no such strategy, Hoover suggested a yearlong moratorium. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon originally opposed the proposal, believing the financial crisis to be a strictly European problem. Immediately thereafter, Mellon left for a European vacation. While abroad, he changed his opinion after viewing conditions firsthand; he threw his support behind the plan in mid-June. When Hoover himself began to wonder whether a moratorium would be beneficial, Secretary of State Stimson urged him to continue for fear the financial crisis in Germany would cause even more economic problems for the United States.\textsuperscript{10}


\textsuperscript{9} Wilson, \textit{American Business and Foreign Policy}, 136-37.

Additionally, Hoover received a plea from President Paul von Hindenburg for American action.\(^{11}\)

Herbert Hoover formally announced his plan on 20 June 1931.\(^{12}\) Specifically, he called for “the postponement during one year of all payments on intergovernmental debts, reparations and relief debts, both principal and interest, of course, not including obligations of governments held by private parties.” He noted that this required the support of the U.S. Congress but urged action due to the larger impact of the Great Depression on European countries. The president also stressed that this proposal in no way meant that debts were to be cancelled, but rather represented an American commitment in making “a contribution to the early restoration of world prosperity.”\(^{13}\)

Hoover’s pronouncement found a receptive audience in Germany. Speaking at a meeting of Germany’s Bankers’ Association, Heinrich Brüning called the moratorium “a world-historical act.” Brüning believed that Germany must use the opportunity to create “a sound and stable financial policy.”\(^{14}\) He had been negotiating budgetary matters with coalition parties and the moratorium reassured his supporters that they might be able to stabilize the German budgetary situation.\(^{15}\)


\(^{13}\) “Text of the President’s Statement Proposing Suspension of Debt,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1931.

\(^{14}\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 July 1931, 862.00PR/96, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{15}\) Patch, *Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic*, 164.
While Germans supported the moratorium immediately, the same could not be said for the French. Hoover had relied on extensive input from the State and Treasury departments in formulating the plan, but he had not sought advice from the European countries that would be affected.\textsuperscript{16} While most of the foreign governments agreed to this course of action, France seethed over the lack of consultation and the fact that the plan would aid its enemy, Germany. For three weeks, the French delayed their approval and only conceded when, after the European financial situation worsened, Hoover threatened to exclude them from the plan.\textsuperscript{17}

Even an immediate implementation of the moratorium probably would not have been enough to avert Germany’s economic meltdown. But it quickly became apparent that a mere moratorium would not stop the nation’s financial slide. Ambassador Sackett claimed that the French opposition lessened “the psychological effect” of the proposal, noting that during the delay the German government struggled as investors pulled foreign capital out of the country and sources of credit dried up, leaving the banks in a “precarious” position.\textsuperscript{18} U.S. military intelligence took it a step further, suggesting that when announced, the plan “was no doubt suitable to avoid the catastrophe” that had developed, but French obstructionism had led to further disintegration of the economic

\textsuperscript{16} Wilson, \textit{American Business and Foreign Policy}, 138-40.

\textsuperscript{17} Hoover, \textit{The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Great Depression}, 72.

\textsuperscript{18} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 15 July 1931, 862.00PR/97, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
situation. \(^{19}\) Regardless, the dire situation forced the German government to act. After the close of business on 13 July 1931, it issued two emergency decrees. One gave the government control of a major insolvent bank; the second declared a bank holiday for 14 and 15 July. \(^{20}\)

Despite the fact that the moratorium did not shore up the economic situation in Germany, Sackett believed that it had influenced the political situation there. The ambassador asserted that the proposal had raised the “hopes” of many and caused embarrassment “to the political extremists who have been thriving on German misfortune.” Yet any optimism Sackett may have had that the reactionary right would be forced from the headlines proved to be short-lived. During the first two weeks of July, the National Opposition, the Nazis and the Nationalists, developed a new strategy “to begin the final struggle to defeat the present order in Germany.” While he did not believe they would be successful, he contended they represented at least an “ambiguous threat” to the Brüning government. Sackett conceded that they had increased the “uneasiness” felt by the population. \(^{21}\) And as long as the financial crisis continued, the Nazis, along with the Communists, would prove even more appealing to discontented Germans. \(^{22}\)

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\(^{19}\) Herbert John Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 24 July 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11542, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{20}\) Sackett to State, 15 July 1931, 862.00PR/97.

\(^{21}\) Sackett to State, 15 July 1931, 862.00PR/97.

With an eye on the financial situation, American officials in Germany focused their efforts on developing a better understanding of political conditions, particularly the status of the Nazis. Following the February 1931 National Socialist walkout from the Reichstag, American officials closely monitored the actions of Adolf Hitler and the party as a whole. In the past, U.S. diplomats in Germany tended to roundly condemn and criticize the actions of the Nazis without providing much coverage of actual events. While their general opinion of the party remained consistent, they now made sure to more fully document its activities and provide additional analysis of the situation. Their coverage of the second half of 1931 focused on what they perceived to be Adolf Hitler’s campaign to make his party appear less revolutionary, and thus, more palatable, to both the German parliamentary establishment and foreign governments. As they noted Hitler’s attempts, American policymakers continued to hold the general belief that the Nazis were not capable of being legitimate participants in a republican government. As evidence, they pointed to in-fighting and dissension within the party and noted the party’s struggles to remain relevant to the national scene.

Although the NSDAP had existed since 1919, American officials had never really viewed it as a legitimate political party. In many ways, their overall opinion of the party as a radical right-wing nationalist organization bent on tapping into German dissatisfaction with its post-World War I government had persisted for over a decade. Even as the Nazis tallied electoral victories starting in the late 1920s, U.S. officials continued to focus on the prevalence of demonstrations and violence rather than the
party’s measurable success in a democratic system. In the 1930s, even Adolf Hitler seemed to understand the need to address this view in order to change outside perceptions of his party.

With a skeptical eye, George Gordon, the chargé d’affaires ad interim, took the lead in documenting Hitler’s efforts to make his party “appear less revolutionary.” The process of stressing the party’s legality had begun back in September 1930, first in a speech and second during testimony at the trial of Nazi members accused of treason. As covered previously, Gordon felt these pronouncements were nothing more than an attempt to ease concerns about the party. What Gordon failed to perceive at the time, though, was that these efforts provided hesitant German nationalists with another reason to see Hitler and the National Socialists as a viable alternative to the more mainstream nationalist parties. Eight months later Gordon remained unconvinced. He noted that while testifying at a May 1931 trial of a Nazi accused of attacking Communists, Hitler again “emphasiz[ed] the legality of his party and his aims.” Yet Gordon found it “difficult to reconcile these statements with the fact that so many Nazis ha[d] been involved in shooting and stabbing affrays.” Not to mention that it would mean believing

23 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 13 May 1931, 862.00/2591, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

24 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 23 September 1930, 862.00/2533, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 25 September 1930, 862.00PR/76, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

that Hitler himself would “be turning from a fire-eating, hot-headed demagogue into what his opponents have termed a ‘sleek apologist of power.’” Gordon considered these actions merely propaganda designed to convince other German parties that the Nazis could be a legitimate partner in a government coalition.26

Hitler may have included an element of propaganda in his approach to gaining support, but he had also been focused on a growing conflict among the Nazi ranks over the past year. Ernst Röhm had returned to take over the disorganized ranks of the SA at the end of 1930. While he quickly established his control of the organization, there seemed to be a developing disconnect between the shock troops and the party as a whole. Hitler believed political power would come by appealing more to the middle classes and becoming a more mainstream political party, yet many members of the SA expected a revolution to occur. While Röhm had some success in settling things down, Walter Stennes, a SA leader in eastern Germany who preferred a militarized SA that would be separate from the Nazi Party, began directly opposing Hitler’s decisions. In March this had led to the outright rebellion of a faction of the SA led by Stennes.27

As part of this attempt to remake the image of the party and retake control, Hitler took steps to support his words with direct actions meant to illustrate his determination. By May 1931, military intelligence believed that the group around Stennes no longer

26 Gordon to State, 13 May 1931, 862.00/2591.

constituted a threat to the Nazi Party.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, that did not mean that there were no problems. Gordon reported that the Nazi leader had found it necessary to purge “recalcitrant and unreliable elements” from the party.\textsuperscript{29} Fearing lingering support of Stennes, Hitler first targeted the SA members in the east and temporarily revoked all of their memberships. Then the party severely cut the budget for the SA as a whole. Additionally, Hitler asserted more direct management by the party over the appointments of local leaders.\textsuperscript{30} American officials seemed unconvinced that these moves would really tamp down the discontent. In fact, Gordon believed that if anything, Hitler’s continued public pronouncements of legality had actually led to more “anxiety” among the ranks.\textsuperscript{31}

In addition to making internal changes in trying to establish a more mainstream profile nationally, Hitler and the National Socialists continued their efforts to win elections at the local level. At best, they experienced mixed results. In the small state of Schaumburg-Lippe in northwest Germany, the Nazis increased their following when they received 26.9 percent of the vote in the May 1931 elections.\textsuperscript{32} Gordon noted that their

\textsuperscript{28} Edward Carpenter, “Summary of the Political Situation for the Month of April 1931,” 13 May 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11436, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{29} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 6 May 1931, 862.00PR/92, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{30} Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party, 218-19.

\textsuperscript{31} Gordon to State, 13 May 1931, 862.00/2591.

vote total represented over 2,500 more votes than they had garnered the previous May.\textsuperscript{33}

During the same period, however, they had also lost their ministerial post in the Thuringian Diet. Upset with Wilhelm Frick’s continued attempts to subvert the educational system, legislators there passed a vote of no confidence in the minister, which stripped him of the post.\textsuperscript{34} The forced removal of Frick also led to the creation of a new minority government in Thuringia that completely excluded the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{35}

All of the NSDAP’s activity had been geared toward increasing its visibility and establishing a solid political reputation, yet the party did not seem to gain any ground with the efforts. Despite the demonstrable electoral successes of the Nazis, Chancellor Brüning and some American officials still believed that the Communist Party represented more of a threat to the government. While the Nazi Party had a rather pedestrian record, which may have factored into continued American and German doubts of its ability to ever become a force in parliamentary government, it clearly had begun to add supporters at a higher rate than the German Communist Party.

As has been noted, in the Reichstag elections of September 1930, only the Nazis and the Communists had made large gains, becoming the second and third largest parties

\textsuperscript{33} Gordon to State, 6 May 1931, 862.00PR/92.


\textsuperscript{35} Gordon to State, 6 May 1931, 862.00PR/92.
in the Reichstag respectively.\textsuperscript{36} The Communist improvement had been expected; they had increased their representation by 22 percent by picking off votes from the Social Democrats. The National Socialists, however, had seemingly exploded into political significance by boosting their representation by 664 percent.\textsuperscript{37} Yet despite the disparity in favor of the Nazis, by the summer of 1931, Brüning feared Communist agitation among the unemployed rather than Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. As he looked to form a new cabinet, Brüning felt it necessary to work with the Social Democrats in an effort to appease the left. At the same time, he pledged not to work with the Nationalists or National Socialists.\textsuperscript{38}

American policymakers also believed that the Communists represented a threat. Following a briefing from Brüning and Sackett during a July 1931 trip to Berlin, Secretary of State Stimson worried that the economic conditions would lead to the expansion of communism.\textsuperscript{39} U.S. officials monitored the Communists and concluded that they were indeed still active. John Kehl, the American consul general in Hamburg, pointed out that the Communists held many more Labor Council seats than the National

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\textsuperscript{36} Heinrich August Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West: Volume 1: 1789-1933, trans. by Alexander J. Sager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 437. For the official results, see George A. Gordon tel to Secretary of State, 14 October 1930, 862.00/2551, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


\textsuperscript{38} Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 184.

\textsuperscript{39} Schmitz, Henry L. Stimson, 87-88.
\end{flushright}
Socialists there. Ambassador Sackett’s coverage of the Communists tended to provide fewer specific examples than his dispatches on the Nazis, but much more torrid language. In one report, he noted that “the Communists have continued their bloody subversive activity, interference with Social Democratic and Nazi meetings resulting in dead and wounded.”

Military intelligence also supported this overall assessment, stating that the spread of communism remained the “greatest danger” in Germany.

Yet the language used to describe the Communists did not accurately reflect the actual political strength of the party in Germany. While Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists set out to improve their national image and professed their adherence to the Weimar Constitution, the Communists had no intention of propelling their electoral gains into a broader political presence within the German government. For them, the strength of the party rested in expanding their influence within the working-class neighborhoods of Germany via grassroots organizing whereas “electoral politics was at best of secondary importance.” So even though the German Communists were indeed receiving more

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40 John E. Kehl to Secretary of State, 28 April 1931, 862.00B/203, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

41 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 23 September 1931, 862.00PR/102, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


votes than they had in the past, they remained tied to local concerns and had no intentions of developing a national party structure.

Much like their view of the NSDAP, American officials did not believe the German Communist Party to be a party capable of working within the parliamentary system. Other factors, however, played a role in determining their focus on the KPD. The German Communists had achieved limited success following World War I with the establishment of the Soviet Republic of Bavaria, and the party remained part of a larger political movement that did control the government of the Soviet Union. Additionally the poor economic situation had halted a slide in membership levels, and much like the Nazis, the Communists began increasing in strength during the early 1930s.44 Plus, a shift by German Communists in their own policy in 1929 had led to a great deal more visibility in the streets. Fearing that the developing success of the National Socialists, particularly the SA, would hurt their membership levels, the German Communist Party began engaging in political violence against the NSDAP in a “‘battle for the streets.’”45

In some ways, Sackett and other officials were absolutely correct in pointing out the increased level of conflict in the streets between Communists and Nazis. Historian Eve Rosenhaft notes that from 1929 to 1933, “violent action against the Nazis was one of a series of agitational methods being propagated in this period [1929 to 1933], ranging from public demonstrations to various forms of direct, extra-legal self-help, all

44 Ben Fowkes, *Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 159-60.

45 Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?*, 25.
characterized by the exercise of physical force.” 46 For the first few years of the new
approach, the Communists still targeted the Social Democrats, but in 1931 they had
shifted their focus. 47 Then, they undertook constant, direct actions against the Nazis in an
attempt to create “mass terror.” 48

Thus, American perceptions regarding the German Communists were accurate
when it came to the increased activity and the use of violence. But as U.S. dispatches
illustrated by omission, the party made no attempts to gain further political leverage in
Germany. At times, American officials did address this lack of a political presence in
roundabout ways. In a scenario developed by the military attaché’s office, a hypothetical
Germany following a revolution was analyzed. Herbert Burgman contended that a
revolution would lead to a dictatorship, but even if the Communists had led the
revolution, they would not be able to rule based on the fact that they had no strong
leaders. In fact, the report concluded that a reactionary party would be more likely to
take power as “numerically the reactionary parties are stronger, are better organized, and
at least have able party politicians.” 49 So even though the potential success of the
Communist Party in Germany continued to be the greatest U.S. fear, American military
intelligence believed that the party itself lacked the ability to truly stage a revolution and
create a government of its own. But its continued use of violence clouded the eyes of

46 Rosenhaft, Beating the Fascists?, 28.

47 Fowkes, Communism in German under the Weimar Republic, 164.

48 Rosenhaft, Beating the Fascists?, 111.

49 Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 24 July 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports,
Germany 1919-1941, Report #11542.
American officials and led them to believe the Communists represented a greater threat than Hitler and the National Socialists.

Despite the continued fear of communism, U.S. officials actually illustrated via their dispatches that Hitler and the Nazis were more active and were having more political success, limited as it had been. While still underestimating them, American policymakers were slowly shifting to a closer examination of the party and its leader. Initially, the situation remained somewhat quiet for the Nazis after their walkout of the Reichstag with the exception of Hitler’s pronouncements that the party would use legal means to gain influence in the government. That soon changed, however.

As the fourth quarter of 1931 began, the National Socialists attempted to further increase their visibility. In gearing up for the opening of the Reichstag, the Nazis planned numerous demonstrations. Sackett noted that one occurred in Berlin on the night of 12 September, Rosh Hashanah. The ambassador’s description was full of sarcasm as he claimed the party “reverted to activity along lines apparently more congenial to them than parliamentary work.” The focus of the violence squared with the anti-Semitic philosophy of the National Socialists as the SA “attacked harmless passersby of Semitic appearance with black-jacks and clubs.” Rather than provide analysis of the Nazi actions or their reasons for targeting this particular group, Sackett resorted to more sarcasm, noting that after beating Jews, the Nazis were “not satisfied with this exhibition of

50 Herbert John Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
heroism” and so they began engaging in property destruction.\textsuperscript{51} Adolf Hitler also announced that the Nazis would end their walkout of the Reichstag and participate once the body reconvened on 13 October. Unconvinced that the Nazis truly supported the constitution, Sackett and military intelligence contended that the Nazis would be participating in the legislative body merely to bring about the failure of the Brüning government.\textsuperscript{52}

The days just prior to the 13 October opening of the Reichstag were full of activity for the Nazis and the German government. In order to ensure that their return to the Reichstag garnered attention and more coverage, Hitler scheduled large-scale meetings and demonstrations for the days just prior to 13 October; the Nazi leader also had his first official meeting with President Paul von Hindenburg. Perhaps more importantly, as the pressure from the success of the extreme nationalist parties mounted, Brüning found it necessary to dismiss his cabinet and quickly form a new one prior to the convening of the Reichstag.\textsuperscript{53}

On 9 October, the National Socialists began selling the new course of legality to their members and to representatives of foreign governments. Save public pronouncements by Hitler proclaiming that the Nazis were taking a new course in following the constitution, nothing had really been done to directly take their message to

\textsuperscript{51} Sackett to State, 23 September 1931, 862.00PR/102.

\textsuperscript{52} Sackett to State, 23 September 1931, 862.00PR/102; Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.

\textsuperscript{53} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 194-96.
their members. At a mass meeting in Berlin, the National Socialists undertook this task and also explained why they changed course in deciding to rejoin the Reichstag. U.S. military intelligence sent a representative to the meeting to gain a better understanding of how the party would explain its position. First Lieutenant Hans Kramer recorded the announced topic as “‘What must happen Now? Why are we going back to the Reichstag?’” During the meeting, the Nazi speakers, particularly Dr. Josef Goebbels, reinforced Hitler’s call to take over the government via legal and constitutional means, starting with the destruction of the Brüning government.54

Yet, the American representative seemed more intrigued by other aspects of the meeting. Kramer expressed surprise about how well behaved the crowd of 10,000 to 12,000 was, contending “its behavior was much more orderly, quiet, and sober than that of a similar crowd at an athletic event in the U.S., not to mention a partisan political meeting.” He also described the diverseness of the crowd, with a third being young people, ages 18 to 24, and the remaining two-thirds being split equally between men and women twenty-five and older. He noted that all were Nazi members or sympathizers who enthusiastically received the speakers.55 Had the Nazis hoped to make a good impression, it seemed that they had found a receptive audience in Kramer.


The military intelligence source also noted that the Nazis seemed to have larger motives in play. Kramer felt that the National Socialists had used the meeting to specifically reach out to foreign governments. The Nazis hoped to have foreigners in attendance so that they would hear party ideas directly instead of relying on the anti-Nazi press for an overview of the events. Kramer felt that the party had hoodwinked the Japanese and American embassies into sending representatives. When Kramer could not get an explanation from the Japanese army officers present regarding why they attended, he asked a Nazi representative. Told that the Japanese were interested in the Nazi view of Russia and that Japan would be the next Fascist country, Kramer remained unconvinced. Rather, he insisted that the Nazis had manipulated the Japanese into attending, and then used their attendance to convince the American Embassy to send observers.\footnote{Kramer, “Report on Nazi Meeting, October 9, 1931,” 12 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11720.} Regardless of the Japanese interest, the National Socialists definitely wanted to improve their image among foreign governments.

While the Nazi walkout from the Reichstag had not led to any positive developments for the party itself, the Brüning government had not managed to solidify its control either. Even as the National Socialists geared up for their return to the Reichstag, Brüning faced changes to his government. The right-wing nationalists were not the only groups pushing for a change. In fact, Brüning’s own allies wanted change; some even advocated the establishment of a temporary dictatorship.\footnote{Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 192-93.} At the beginning of October,
Hindenburg had charged the chancellor to form “a new Cabinet ‘not bound by political parties.’” Doing so would be difficult, however, as the German National People’s Party pressured the chancellor to include more nationalist ministers.\(^5^8\)

Sackett notified the State Department that the new cabinet had been formed the night of 9 October.\(^5^9\) The cabinet remained strikingly unchanged, however, as there were only two new ministers, both men who claimed no political affiliation.\(^6^0\) Sackett nevertheless concluded that it leaned more to the right than its predecessor.\(^6^1\) He also noted that two ministers held two portfolios, speculating that this had been done so that if this cabinet faltered, Brüning could more easily establish a dictatorship as he had close supporters holding multiple positions.\(^6^2\) Neither Sackett nor military intelligence seemed to feel that this shift to the right represented a problem. In fact, military intelligence believed that Brüning’s ability to form a new cabinet so quickly boded well for the country.\(^6^3\)

\(^{58}\) Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 9 October 1931, 862.00/2619, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{59}\) Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 10 October 1931, 862.00/2621, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{60}\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 13 October 1931, 862.00/2631, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{61}\) Sackett tel to State, 10 October 1931, 862.00/2621.

\(^{62}\) Sackett to State, 13 October 1931, 862.00/2631.

\(^{63}\) Herbert John Burgman, “The New Brüning Cabinet,” 13 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11723, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Yet, clearly Hindenburg had begun to feel the strain of a struggling government that did not include many of his supporters on the right. In August 1931, he had met with Alfred Hugenberg to urge cooperation with the Brüning government.\textsuperscript{64} When things continued to go poorly, Hitler and the Nazis gained an audience they had never had to this point. On 10 October 1931 President Paul von Hindenburg met with Hitler for the very first time.\textsuperscript{65} The meeting had actually been arranged by Brüning with the hope of convincing Hindenburg that including Hitler and the National Socialists in a government at this time would not be effective.\textsuperscript{66} Military intelligence, however, failed to have a firm grasp on why the meeting had been arranged, suggesting it stemmed from Hindenburg’s fears that the National Opposition might be successful in shifting the government to the right.\textsuperscript{67} In other words, they did not understand that Hindenburg actually desired more involvement of the right in the government.\textsuperscript{68}

Reaction to the meeting proved to be mixed. While criticized by republican elements in Germany, the visit proved popular among Nazi circles and did add to Hitler’s prestige.\textsuperscript{69} Hindenburg came away from the meeting unimpressed, believing Hitler to be

\textsuperscript{64} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 184-85.

\textsuperscript{65} Frederic M. Sackettel to Secretary of State, 10 October 1931, 862.00/2620, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{66} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 194.

\textsuperscript{67} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.

\textsuperscript{68} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 184.

\textsuperscript{69} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.
“uncouth” and “unqualified for high office.”\textsuperscript{70} The meeting did not alter Hitler’s behavior, as he resumed his reassurances that the Nazis would pursue legal and constitutional actions and continued his criticisms of the Brüning government.\textsuperscript{71} And Hitler seemed to revel in the higher stature given him by army officers and judges impressed that he had been given an audience with the war hero.\textsuperscript{72} American officials did not express concern regarding the meeting, but they closely watched the Nazi activities that followed. The day the Reichstag reconvened the National Opposition held a large rally in Bad Harzburg, a town in the Free State of Brunswick, in which a Nazi held the position of minister of the interior.\textsuperscript{73} Because many German states had forbidden the Nazis from marching in their uniforms, the rally had to be held in a Nazi stronghold.\textsuperscript{74} Adolf Hitler’s National Socialists and Alfred Hugenberg’s Nationalists headlined the events, but also included were numerous right-wing organizations like the Stahlhelm, members of former royal families, General Hans von Seeckt, and Hjalmar Schacht. Collectively, the participants became known as the Harzburg Front.\textsuperscript{75} Ambassador Sackett recapped the parade and “glittering uniforms”

\textsuperscript{70} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 194.

\textsuperscript{71} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 21 October 1931, 862.00PR/104, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{72} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 194-95.

\textsuperscript{73} Gordon to State, 21 October 1931, 862.00PR/104.

\textsuperscript{74} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.

\textsuperscript{75} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 445.
and pointed out that the rally offered little in terms of a solution for Germany’s political and economic difficulties. The Harzburg Front pledged to bring down the Brüning government and agreed to four resolutions to be introduced in the Reichstag.  

Specifically, the resolutions called for a vote of no confidence in Brüning’s cabinet, new Reichstag elections, the revocation of emergency decrees in place, and an end to the practice of partially funding the Prussian police.

While there appeared to be general agreement and cooperation between the Nazis and Hugenberg’s Nationalists, internal issues existed just beneath the surface. Reinforcing the American view that the Nazis were not prepared to truly participate in running a government, one disagreement centered on which group would literally lead the parades in Bad Harzburg. Determined to keep his party front and center, Hitler agreed to have the Nazis lead the parade in return for Hugenberg getting to speak at the rally before Hitler.  

U.S. officials failed to note that Hitler left the parade after the SA formations, thus not respecting the other right-wing organizations involved.  

While American officials seemed to believe that the rally did show some strife among the

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76 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 13 October 1931, 862.00/2630, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


78 Sackett to State, 13 October 1931, 862.00/2630.

79 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 445.
groups of the right, they also expressed surprise that such an undertaking was even possible.\textsuperscript{80}

Despite all of the fanfare, the National Socialist return to the Reichstag soon proved to be rather anticlimactic. Adding to the continued American view that the National Socialists were not a legitimate threat to the government of Germany, the four resolutions supported by the Harzburg Front were rejected within days of the Reichstag being reconvened.\textsuperscript{81} A quick adjournment of the Reichstag followed after the legislative body gave the Brüning government a slim vote of confidence of 295 to 270 and agreed to reconvene in February.\textsuperscript{82} The Reichstag had only been in session for four days and U.S. military intelligence noted that this development clearly hindered the opposition to Brüning by leaving it “without a forum for its agitation.”\textsuperscript{83}

At this point, one American observer began to speculate that the Nazi efforts were leading to a much more prominent role in Germany. Herbert Burgman of the military attaché’s office may have seen something other U.S. officials did not. After the adjournment of the Reichstag, he argued that the exclusion of the Nazis from Brüning’s cabinet “only postpone[d] the date when the Nazi Party will have a deciding influence on political affairs in Germany.” He felt that had there been new Reichstag elections, in all

\textsuperscript{80} Sackett to State, 13 October 1931, 862.00/2630.

\textsuperscript{81} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.

\textsuperscript{82} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 197.

\textsuperscript{83} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.
likelihood, the Nazis would have made “overwhelming gains.” Much like American officials in general, Burgman could not understand the wide range of support the party received as he found its political program to be inconsistent ideologically, save its opposition to the Treaty of Versailles. Yet the party’s efforts in the last year had begun to convince him that the situation had changed. And Burgman argued that the Nazis would not attempt a putsch as Hitler “knows that power is much more secure and lasting if gained by legal means and his chances of gaining power in this manner next spring are decidedly good.”84 Yet this analysis remained the exception among U.S. officials, rather than the rule.

The political stagnation notwithstanding, Hitler and the National Socialists remained active and in the public eye. Soon after the Reichstag adjournment, Hitler staged another show, this time in the capital city of the Free State of Brunswick. George Gordon reported that the Nazis were active even prior to the rally, attacking opponents on the street with over twenty people going to the hospital as a result.85 The Nazis claimed that 100,000 men traveled to take part in the demonstration.86 Gordon countered the Nazi claim of 100,000 participants, with a general statement that “other sources” put the number at about 30,000. More disturbances and violence followed the rally, when the Nazis targeted the working class sections of the city. Their efforts led to 3 deaths and


85 Gordon to State, 21 October 1931, 862.00PR/104.

inspired more destruction as Communists in the area responded with property damage to stores and restaurants whose owners had shown their support of the Nazis during the rally.\(^87\) While the National Socialists may have been increasing their support among reactionary nationalists in Brunswick, these actions contributed to the continual dismissal of the party as a legitimate political option by most American observers.

The Nazis also sustained their focus on gaining ground politically through local elections. U.S. officials closely followed the local elections in Germany and found that the electoral success of the Nazis continued. During the fall in the Free States of Anhalt and Mecklenberg-Schwerin, the Nazis made gains at the expense of all the other parties save the Communists.\(^88\) In the Free State of Oldenburg, the Nazis polled 46 percent of the vote in the elections held in Birkenfeld, doubling their total from the September 1930 Reichstag elections there.\(^89\) Frederic Sackett joined military intelligence in speculating that should new elections for the Reichstag be held, the net result would be tremendous Nazi gains. The ambassador predicted the Nazis would increase their seats from 107 to 175. Since many of the NSDAP votes came from previous supporters of other parties on the right, however, he believed the party would fall short of a majority in the Reichstag.\(^90\)

\(^87\) Gordon to State, 21 October 1931, 862.00PR/104.

\(^88\) Sackett noted that the Communists also garnered additional votes, but they were “slight” compared to the National Socialists. Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 4 November 1931, 862.00PR/105, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^89\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 December 1931, 862.00PR/107, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^90\) Sackett to State, 4 November 1931, 862.00PR/105.
According to multiple American sources, the most significant election results came with the November polling in Hesse. Sackett noted that the NSDAP had increased its vote totals 100 percent in garnering over 300,000 of the 800,000 votes cast. While Hesse itself made up only one-fortieth of Germany’s electorate, its importance rested in the fact that its composition was very similar to the largest German state, Prussia. Sackett contended that as soon as the results were in, political observers felt this provided a glimpse into the strength of the political parties in Germany.\textsuperscript{91} An American Embassy memo outlined the concerns of the United States. According to the document, written by Alfred Kliefoth, the first secretary at the embassy, the results in Hesse illustrated that should Reichstag elections be held, the Nazis would become the largest party. Because they would not be able to gain a majority alone, they would still need to join in a coalition.\textsuperscript{92}

The pronouncements of legality and steady electoral improvement of the National Socialists caught the attention of U.S. diplomats, yet before a reevaluation of the party could occur, a potentially damaging scandal developed. In late November 1931, Hessian police seized documents detailing the Nazi plan for a counter coup d’état should Communists seize control of the state.\textsuperscript{93} Written primarily by Werner Best, the material

\textsuperscript{91} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 16 November 1931, 862.00/2634, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{92} Alfred Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Frederic M. Sackett to Pierre de Lagarde Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{93} Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 225.
came to be known as the “Boxheim documents,” because Best and a group of fellow Hessian Nazis discussed the contents at the Boxheim manor in southern Hesse. The central feature of the contingency plans called for the SA to have all power in the state through the use of brute force after the Nazis defeated the Communists.

Once the documents were published, the leaders of the Nazi Party quickly moved to ensure damage control. Hitler denied they represented an official party policy, arguing they were local documents written by party members in Hesse. Nazi leaders additionally pointed out that the documents clearly constituted a contingency plan should the Communists seize power in Hesse and were in a way a blueprint for a takeover of Germany. The Boxheim documents alarmed Chancellor Brüning enough to push for the prosecution of Best for treason, but the government dropped the charges in September 1932 due to a lack of evidence. Shortly after dominating the headlines of newspapers throughout Germany, the issue faded away.

While the discovery of the Boxheim documents failed to affect the Nazis in the long run, American officials quickly focused on the contents and their potential ramifications. Despite claims that the plans only reflected the local mindset of the Hessian Nazis, Sackett believed the documents did describe the “Third Reich” envisioned

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94 Herbert John Burgman, “A Nazi Program,” 3 December 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11825, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


97 Beck, The Fateful Alliance, 79.
by the SA as they contained “instructions for a Nazi dictatorship by terrorist methods.” Within days of their publication in Germany, Sackett had sent the State Department a translation of the documents from a German newspaper and a ten-page report analyzing their contents and the situation in Hesse.\(^9\) The military attaché’s office also examined the plans. Herbert Burgman considered the documents the first true opportunity to see what type of regime the Nazis intended to establish should they gain control of the German government. In all of his campaigning, Hitler had been careful to avoid presenting a detailed plan, something Burgman saw as a deliberate action as Hitler knew it would be too difficult to please all of the various groups supporting him.\(^9\) By examining documents never meant for public consumption, American officials hoped to arrive at a better understanding of the party and its future.

Sackett and Burgman approached the material differently. The ambassador seemed fixated on how closely the actions and punishments described in the documents resembled the methods of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police. The first part of his analysis focused on the punishment favored in the contingency plans: “shooting for failure to obey the orders of Nazi storm detachments.” Sackett then noted that the economic provisions called for the abolishment of private property, state control of the food supply, and compulsory labor. He found it difficult to accept Hitler’s claims that he

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\(^9\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 December 1931, 862.00/2644, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

had no knowledge of the documents when the Nazi leader had constantly proclaimed that “nothing happens in his party without his approval or that is not in accordance with his wish.” Sackett therefore came to the conclusion that the documents indeed represented the view of government held by the Nazis.\textsuperscript{100} He quickly moderated his view, however, after examining Hitler’s public pronouncements on the matter in which the Nazi leader stressed the legality of the movement. Sackett still worried that a civil war would break out in Germany should the Nazis assume complete control, but he believed that if the party took its time and “assume[d] responsibility of government by stages,” that could be avoided.\textsuperscript{101}

For his part, Burgman provided the history of the Boxheim plan, its details, and the responses of the Nazis when it went public. Burgman correctly noted that the next step remained figuring out “to what extent it reflects the Nazi ideas as a whole.” In his report, he quickly debunked the Nazis’ claim that they were only preparing for a Communist uprising, pointing out that republican parties still represented a majority of voters in Germany and that the Nazis controlled 30 to 40 percent of the remaining vote. Thus, the Communists lacked the numbers to successfully gain control of the government. The disclosure of the events in Hesse did affect Burgman’s analysis of the

\textsuperscript{100} Sackett to State, 1 December 1931, 862.00/2644.

\textsuperscript{101} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2652, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
overall situation in Germany.\textsuperscript{102} Just in July, he had suggested that the spread of communism represented the “greatest danger” in Germany.\textsuperscript{103} By October, he had concluded that the Nazis would shortly have “a deciding influence on political affairs in Germany.”\textsuperscript{104} After examining the Boxheim documents, Burgman claimed “the danger to the present form of government threatens from the direction of the Nazis.” Yet, he still struggled to make sense of the Nazi program and where the party fit politically without linking it to communism. Burgman believed that the documents illustrated the Nazis planned to install a different type of communism in Germany, “national communism.”\textsuperscript{105} So a National Socialist government would still represent a threat, just a different one than a Communist government.

While the Boxheim documents caused some reevaluation among American officials, their larger impact on the German political system remained minimal. According to Sackett, the documents had a “sobering effect” on some Germans who had been pushing for National Socialist inclusion in the cabinet. Despite the fact that the material detailed the creation of a Nazi government, however, the ambassador also believed it really would not alter the political situation in Germany nor would it “check

\textsuperscript{102} Burgman, “A Nazi Program,” 3 December 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11825.

\textsuperscript{103} Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 24 July 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11542.

\textsuperscript{104} Burgman, “Recent Activities of the Right Opposition Parties,” 21 October 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11730.

\textsuperscript{105} Burgman, “A Nazi Program,” 3 December 1931, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #11825.
materially the growth” of the NSDAP. The economic situation in Germany meant that
the creation of a demonstrably different government still appealed to many Germans.¹⁰⁶

The disclosures in Hesse did further exacerbate the tensions on the right between
Hitler and Hugenberg. Alfred Hugenberg viewed the ongoing wave of negative publicity
generated by the Boxheim plan as his opportunity to wrest some of the power among
right-wing nationalists away from Hitler. He made sure that Nationalist journals printed
the documents and commentary in an attempt to “discredit the Nazis.” He also stressed
the parts of the documents that suggested “a reign of terror along the lines of the
Bolshevist Cheka.”¹⁰⁷ But Hugenberg could not diminish the popularity of the Nazi
leader.

The entire affair also caused the question of legality to resurface and Hitler sought
to reassure foreigners that the party should not be viewed as described in the Boxheim
documents. Sackett noted that even local Nazi leaders continually promised to use
constitutional means, but he added, “they invariably add, sneeringly and with significant
and unmistakable gesture, that this ‘legality’ will last only until they get into power.”¹⁰⁸
Sackett believed that while Hitler tried to make the party seem more mainstream to
Germans and to foreign governments, his supporters were not following suit.¹⁰⁹ Yet

¹⁰⁶ Sackett to State, 1 December 1931, 862.00/2644.
¹⁰⁷ Sackett to State, 2 December 1931, 862.00PR/107.
¹⁰⁸ Sackett to State, 1 December 1931, 862.00/2644.
¹⁰⁹ Sackett to State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2652.
Hitler continued with his approach, and American diplomats in Germany struggled to predict what would happen next for the extremist party.

In less than a year, American officials had considerably altered their opinion of the potential success of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. They had mocked the Nazi walkout from the Reichstag in February 1931 as yet another example of the immaturity of the party and its inability to truly work within the political system in Germany. The walkout did not lead to direct political success for the National Socialists, but they had persevered and continued their electoral plan via local elections. Throughout the year, Adolf Hitler had continuously maintained that the party would pursue legal and constitutional paths to power in Germany. Even with the disclosure of the Boxheim documents, which called into question Nazi plans for Germany, the party made positive political strides. While U.S. policymakers seemed at a loss to explain the party’s continued popularity, by the end of 1931 they acknowledged that Hitler and his National Socialists would shortly play a direct role in the government of Germany.

IV

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists had dominated reports since the Reichstag elections of 1930, yet American officials had kept their distance. U.S. diplomats had initially believed that the popularity of the party would wane, but that had not proven to be the case. Clearly, Sackett and his colleagues had never viewed Hitler as an adequate statesman, and even as information seemed to suggest otherwise, they continued to hesitate. By the end of 1931, U.S. officials were forced to acknowledge not
just the success of the Nazis but also that the leader and his party seemed destined to play a direct role in the German government.

At the end of 1931, American officials took a somewhat more active role in determining the approach of the Nazis. For the first time since the early 1920s, an American official met with Adolf Hitler. Truman Smith had met with Hitler and other Nazi officials in order to get a handle on the newly formed group when it had first achieved some success in Bavaria. But after the failed Beer Hall Putsch, most American policymakers discounted the significance of the party. As the party raised its profile, doubts remained about its ability to succeed in Germany. Initially, embassy staffers clashed regarding whether the United States should have direct contact with the NSDAP in the early 1930s. George Gordon, the counselor of the embassy from March 1930 to October 1931, strove to follow protocol, which meant only having contact with representatives of the government in power.\textsuperscript{110} George S. Messersmith, the general consul in Berlin, encouraged interaction and to Gordon’s dismay, took Ambassador Sackett on his travels throughout Berlin.\textsuperscript{111} Later, more contact also occurred when Gordon requested and received a hardship leave at the end of 1931. John Wiley, the interim counselor of the embassy, then actively encouraged contact with the Nazis.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Gordon served in the post from March 1930 to October 1931 and from June 1932 until his recall in late 1933. Burke, \textit{Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic}, 171, 183-84, 244; Fred Arthur Bailey, \textit{William Edward Dodd: The South’s Yeoman Scholar} (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 151-52.


\textsuperscript{112} Wiley served in the position from October 1931 to May 1932, upon which time Gordon returned to Berlin. Burke, \textit{Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic}, 171.
The American contacts with the party and its leader in the early 1930s were much less proactive than those in the early 1920s as the Nazi leadership tended to initiate the encounters. While American officials may not have been initiating contact, the meetings were significant considering that the NSDAP had become a party to be reckoned with on the national level.

Adolf Hitler used his own growing popularity in Germany to engineer meetings with U.S. officials both for himself and for other Nazi leaders. The first meetings came shortly after the publication of the Hessian material and seemed to be a part of Hitler’s larger public relations campaign to improve the overall view of the party, even among foreigners. The American dispatches on these meetings illustrate just how unfamiliar Nazi leaders were to the State Department as extended biographical sketches of them were often included. While the Nazis hoped to improve the American opinion of their party, the meetings tended to reinforce the general U.S. belief that Hitler and his party were unprepared for power.

Despite the growing National Socialist presence in Germany, American officials hesitated to meet face to face with members of the party leadership. In a personal dispatch to Secretary of State Henry Stimson, Sackett conveyed that he had been “disturbed” by regular Nazi attempts to meet with him as he did not feel that he should receive members of an opposition party. At the same time, he felt that he should avail
himself of their company as he believed that Hitler and his party would soon control the
government.\textsuperscript{113} The resistance to meeting the Nazis came to an end on 5 December 1931.

American officials met with the Nazis on two separate occasions on 5 December. First Secretary of the Embassy Alfred Kliefoth had a lunch meeting with Ernst Röhm and Ernst Hanfstaengl, Hitler’s liaison officer with the foreign press. Hanfstaengl had used his connection with Louis P. Lochner, chief of the Associated Press’s Berlin office, to schedule the meeting. In their meeting with Kliefoth, the Nazis seemed to be attempting to calm any fears Americans had regarding the SA and to address how anti-Semitism fit with the Nazi philosophy. Röhm stressed that the SA should not be considered a military organization, but rather maintained that it served to “protect” the Nazis from attacks by opponents. Hanfstaengl provided an overview of Hitler’s philosophy, emphasizing that at its core it remained a belief in nationalism, which explained the disregard of the Jews. He argued that Hitler did not dislike individual Jews, just the race, but that the rank and file sometimes misinterpreted this aspect of Nazi philosophy. Plus, Hanfstaengl assured Kliefoth that “the movement would not only exterminate Communism in Germany, but Socialism as well” as Hitler strove to achieve a dictatorship.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{113} Frederic M. Sackett personal to Henry L. Stimson, 9 December 1931, 862.50/723, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{114} Alfred W. Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2649, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
In the afternoon, Sackett and Kliefoth met with Hitler, Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, and Hanfstaengl at a clandestine meeting. Sackett and Kliefoth arrived with their wives at a German banker’s home, unaware that they would be meeting with the Nazi leader. While Sackett realized who Hitler was, he was introduced to those gathered as Herr Wolff. Almost immediately following the introductions Hitler launched into a speech about unemployment in Germany without allowing any questions. The Nazi leader, speaking as Herr Wolff, also told the embassy officials that should his party take power, they would stop paying reparations. This, he asserted, put Germany in a poor position as should France invade for payment, it would be unable to defend itself as the SA “were intended only for the purpose of keeping order within Germany and suppressing Communism.”

Sackett came away from the meeting with the feeling that Hitler had organized this meeting to impress him, but the ambassador felt far from impressed. In his personal dispatch to Stimson, Sackett relayed his poor view of the Nazi leader, calling him “a fanatical crusader” and an “opportunist.” The meeting seemed to reinforce longstanding American views of Hitler as the ambassador asserted that Hitler “is certainly not the type from which statesmen evolve.” While Sackett had not enjoyed his direct exposure to the Nazis, he did not think he should avoid such meetings in the future since Nazi success was becoming more “likely” and he could develop a “valuable contact.”

115 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 7 December 1931, 862.50/721, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

116 Sackett personal to Stimson, 9 December 1931, 862.50/723.
Less than a week later, Alfred Kliefoth attended a lunch organized by Sigrid Schultz, the Chicago Tribune’s Berlin correspondent. Göring attended in order to dispute a rumor circulating that should the Nazis take power they planned to eliminate American businesses from Germany. Göring informed Kliefoth that Hitler had authorized him to deny the account and assure the United States that American businesses, particularly in manufacturing, would be welcomed, although he acknowledged that the Nazis would be restricting imports in order to develop a favorable trade surplus that would be used to pay debts. Kliefoth also conveyed that Göring made it very clear that while Brüning would not be a part of a Nazi government, the Nazis did not oppose President Hindenburg.\footnote{Alfred Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” 9 December 1931, enclosure to Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 11 December 1931, 862.00/2656, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.}

At the same time that American diplomats in Germany were attempting to arrive at a clearer understanding of the Nazis, the State Department tried to do the same. Pierre de Lagarde Boal, chief of the State Department’s Division of Western European Affairs, sent Ambassador Sackett a memo containing the department’s view of Hitler and the National Socialists with a request for input from the embassy. State believed that the Nazis were “unquestionably obtaining increased strength” not just via elections but also psychologically, and that they expected the party to gain power soon. The memo drew parallels between the programs and ideas of the Nazis and Benito Mussolini’s Fascists in Italy, claiming that Hitler shared Mussolini’s approach in inciting the people with
“national war cries without any defined objective.” Sackett responded that for the most part American officials in Germany concurred. The ambassador forwarded a memo prepared primarily by Alfred Kliefoth. Kliefoth directly linked the gains made by the Nazis to the poor economy and the high levels of unemployment in Germany. While the Nazis had done increasingly well in elections, the first secretary of the embassy contended that the party could not sustain its growth as it had not been able to gain votes from the middle parties or the parties on the left. Additionally, the embassy memo suggested that the Nazis lagged behind in gaining the support of prominent Germans, and thus would be unable to grow much more than they already had.

The potential for the Nazis to gain power represented one clear area of agreement. Kliefoth pointed out that the Brüning government’s practice of issuing emergency decrees had set up a situation in Germany where Hitler could establish a dictatorship rather easily. And the embassy agreed that at some point the Nazis would at least play a role in a ruling government. But despite acknowledging their potential, the American Embassy continued to downplay the ability of both Hitler and his party to rule. The memo detailed potential problems for the party: the trade unions of the Catholics and the

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118 Pierre de Lagarde Boal to Frederic M. Sackett, 1 December 1931, 862.00/2645A, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

119 Frederic M. Sackett to Pierre de Lagarde Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

120 Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Sackett to Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682.
Communists; the lack of support from prominent Germans; and the impact of an improving economy.\textsuperscript{121}

The embassy’s comparison of Hitler and the Nazis to Mussolini and the Fascists differed from the State Department view in suggesting that while there were surface similarities, the differences were more significant. The embassy believed that Hitler based his overall program “on the old Hohenzollern and Prussian idea of strong centralization, imperialism and expansion” and not the idea of a cooperative state. The Nazi program also included anti-Semitism, which was not a factor in Italy. There were areas where it coincided with the State Department view as both emphasized chauvinism, opposed the “emigration of their peoples,” and stressed the importance of the personality of the leader. But even though they shared the emphasis on the cult of personality, the embassy viewed the abilities of the two men differently. Kliefoth contended that the Italian leader had “the intellect and bearing of a martial hero,” whereas the Nazi leader had “the intellect of a crusading sectarian leader – oblivious of dangers which surround him – but with intense energy and relentless in the pursuit of his aims.”\textsuperscript{122}

The embassy view clearly illustrated the prevailing view of many in the United States that Benito Mussolini and the Fascists had played a positive role in Italy. State Department reports illustrated the belief that prior to Mussolini, Italy had been in a state

\textsuperscript{121} Even though there could be problems with the trade unions, Kliefoth noted that should a general strike occur, that “their S.A. troops are organized principally for the purpose of dealing with internal disorders and would be able to cope with a general strike.” Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Sackett to Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682.

\textsuperscript{122} Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Sackett to Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682.
of turmoil. The prevailing view became that the Fascists represented traditional ideas in Italy, including patriotism, strength, and effective government. Throughout the 1920s, American money flowed there as the U.S. government felt that the stability of Mussolini’s right-wing dictatorship provided the appropriate government.123 The State Department believed that Mussolini’s ascension to power had led to a more modern economy and established a needed bulwark against communism.124 The embassy saw Mussolini as a statesman who had earned his position, whereas Hitler was more of a firebrand merely rallying the masses behind him. Based on the content of the memo, the embassy clearly felt that Hitler’s movement remained illegitimate at this point.

Over time, Chancellor Brüning had also become quite concerned about the growing strength of Hitler and the Nazis. The financial difficulties in Germany led to a growing reaction among the masses against the Brüning government. Even Gordon noted that the situation had become “more and more disquieting” since May.125 The chancellor felt the situation merited action in December 1931, issuing emergency decrees banning demonstrations and the wearing of uniforms associated with political organizations during the year-end holidays. Then Brüning took a further step and directly criticized Hitler and the Nazis in a radio broadcast, challenging their true dedication to

123 David F. Schmitz, Thank God They’re On Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 30–45.
124 Schmitz, Henry L. Stimson, 85.
125 George A. Gordon, “Memorandum,” 15 December 1931, 862.00/2655 1/2, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930–1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Sackett noted that this showed that Brüning had “energetically and unequivocally” rejected the growing notion that the Nazis would soon become a part of the German government. Brüning’s actions against the party continued, making sure that Hitler was denied the ability to make a foreign broadcast. Sackett believed this illustrated the chancellor’s attempt to limit Hitler’s growing influence.

Despite the Brüning government’s new turn against the National Socialists, Sackett admitted that he continued to have a problem getting a handle on things in early December 1931. The embassy had already noted that Brüning’s use of emergency decrees had created a government in Germany that could easily be shifted to a dictatorship. Yet, it did not view this as a threat, and even felt that not much would change with the German government should Hitler establish a dictatorship. Sackett believed that Hitler’s views were becoming more moderate and that the leader intended to follow legal avenues to power, yet, even as Hitler seemingly moved into the mainstream, his followers continued to agitate and were becoming more extreme. This confusion meant that while Sackett seemed to see a Nazi government as inevitable, he hoped that the party would assume control in stages in order to avoid a civil war in

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126 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 228-29.
127 Sackett to State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2652.
128 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 15 December 1931, 862.00PR/108, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
129 Sackett to State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2652.
130 Kliefoth, “Memorandum,” n.d., enclosure to Sackett to Boal, 12 January 1932, 862.00/2682.
Germany. Under no circumstances could Sackett reconcile these beliefs to his sense that Hitler was “certainly not the type from which statesmen evolve.”

V

The National Socialists were in the thick of the political situation as 1932 began. Hitler had propelled his party to prominence through constant campaigning and electoral success at the local level. Participating in a government coalition had remained elusive, but as the new year opened, Hitler had the presidency in his sights. For their part, most American officials remained in partial disbelief that Hitler had been able to achieve any success nationally. Because they continued to believe Hitler would be an inadequate statesman, they failed to see the growing likelihood of his candidacy. Most American observers doubted Hitler would be successful, but as they monitored the situation, varying opinions of the leader and his party started to emerge.

In the middle of the developing political turmoil, Germany faced a presidential election. President Paul von Hindenburg’s term would end in May 1932. At eighty-four years old, Hindenburg felt burdened by the stresses of political life and did not look favorably on a re-election campaign, even though most in Germany believed he would readily win the election. While Hindenburg debated the merits of running, he let

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131 Sackett to State, 8 December 1931, 862.00/2652.

132 Sackett personal to Stimson, 9 December 1931, 862.50/723.

133 Sackett to State, 15 December 1931, 862.00PR/108.
Brüning knew that he would continue to serve should he not need to stand for re-election. Brüning feared the results of an election that did not have Hindenburg as a candidate, so he began courting Reichstag supporters to garner the two-thirds vote necessary to extend Hindenburg’s term in office.\textsuperscript{134} Government leaders initiated negotiations with the Social Democrats and the National Opposition in an attempt to acquire their support. Aware of the situation, American officials noted that precedent for such a move existed, as the Reichstag had extended the term of President Friedrich Ebert in 1922.\textsuperscript{135} It quickly became apparent, however, that Brüning would be unable to rally sufficient support, particularly due to the resistance posed by the National Opposition.\textsuperscript{136}

The National Socialists took a couple of different approaches to opposing the extension of Hindenburg’s term. In one move, they pledged their support for the measure should it also coincide with Brüning’s resignation.\textsuperscript{137} When Brüning failed to agree to those terms, the Nazis submitted to him their official constitutional and political arguments for rejecting the measure. Sackett contended that the Nazi memorandum was “violently aggressive” and the argument rather “unconvincing.” While he did not feel that Hitler had necessarily improved his position by opposing the extension of

\textsuperscript{134} Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 231-32.

\textsuperscript{135} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 14 January 1932, 862.00/2668, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{136} Heiber, The Weimar Republic, 191.

\textsuperscript{137} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 20 January 1932, 862.00/2672, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Hindenburg’s term, Sackett felt that this response contributed to increasing the political tension in the country, which would make the presidential election difficult.\textsuperscript{138}

In addition to opposing the extension, the National Socialists began suggesting that Hitler might run for the presidency himself. Sackett relayed to the State Department that Brüning had already acknowledged this possibility to him.\textsuperscript{139} Hermann Göring informed John Wiley that the Nazis had yet to decide who would run for the party, but that Hitler remained a possibility.\textsuperscript{140} As groups jockeyed for position on the right, the Nazis made it clear that they would only support a candidate of their own, yet Hitler refused to speculate about who the candidate might be.\textsuperscript{141} As February began, Sackett reported that “authoritative Nazi sources” had divulged that in all likelihood Hitler would be the Nazi candidate for the presidency. The ambassador seemed to dismiss Hitler’s political prospects as he noted that the previous week had witnessed decreased political tensions. If that trend continued, he believed it would hinder Hitler’s ability to garner support. He also warned, however, that further deterioration of the financial situation might “lead to disquieting results, the possibility of which must be contemplated.”\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{138} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 19 January 1932, 862.00/2671, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{139} Sackett to State, 20 January 1932, 862.00/2672.

\textsuperscript{140} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 20 January 1932, 862.00/2663, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{141} Orlow, \textit{The History of the Nazi Party}, 245-46.

\textsuperscript{142} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 1 February 1932, 862.00/2670, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
In the months that followed, numerous individuals jockeyed for position as some potential candidates speculated about running and others announced their intentions to do so. The Communists had been the first to announce on 12 January. Their candidate would be Ernst Thälmann. Many parties waited for an official pronouncement from Hindenburg, who had been reevaluating his situation since his bid for a term extension had failed. Eventually Hindenburg agreed to a reelection bid as long as he had the backing of his former supporters on the right, but it would take some time to discern whether that was the case.\footnote{Sackett confidently reported that due to the efforts of a non-partisan committee, \cite{Sackett1932}} The parties and other influential organizations, like the Stahlhelm, on the right struggled to make a decision as speculation continued that Adolf Hitler might run in the election as well.\footnote{Even as confusion surrounding Hindenburg cleared up, more issues arose regarding Hitler’s potential candidacy. Opposition to Hindenburg’s candidacy from the right came from both the Nationalists and the National Socialists. In fact, General Wilhelm Groener, the minister of defense and of the interior, informed embassy staff that in the government’s view, Nationalist leader Alfred Hugenberg represented the decisive factor.\cite{Sackett1932} Sackett confidently reported that due to the efforts of a non-partisan committee, Hindenburg’s reelection bid was secure.\cite{Sackett1932} 

\footnote{Sackett, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 446-47.}

\footnote{Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 233-38.}

\footnote{John C. Wiley, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 2 February 1932, enclosure to Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 February 1932, 862.00/2680, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.}
Hindenburg would soon accept a nomination to run. The Nazis were in a bit of disarray due to concerns regarding Hitler’s eligibility. Despite his service in the German Army during World War I, as of the beginning of 1932, Hitler had not yet become a German citizen. Sackett informed the State Department that gaining citizenship in Germany would not present too many obstacles for Hitler as he could fulfill the requirement by being appointed as a civil servant in a German state. As the Nazis had influence in numerous state governments, Sackett speculated that not only was this possible, but that it could definitely happen in the Nazi-dominated Free State of Brunswick. The ambassador did note that some German legal experts claimed any appointment would not be “in good faith” as Hitler would not actually be serving that state, but rather just clearing a hurdle to run for the presidency. Yet Sackett seemed to have an understanding of the tense situation in Germany and wondered whether German governmental officials would risk agitating the Nazis over what the ambassador felt was a technicality.

While Sackett and the embassy focused on monitoring the political maneuverings to determine the presidential slate, military intelligence continued to focus on the National Socialists. In particular, Herbert Burgman seemed more concerned about the potential ramifications of a Nazi holding the presidency. He warned that once a Nazi held that post, it would be relatively easy for the party to parlay its success into greater

146 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 February 1932, 862.00/2681, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

147 Sackett to State, 2 February 1932, 862.00/2681.
gains, as a Nazi president would have the ability to appoint a Nazi cabinet and dissolve the Reichstag. Burgman speculated that should new Reichstag elections be held, the Nazis would attempt to win votes by violence and intimidation at the polls. Should their efforts to gain a majority fail, the Nazi president could just dissolve the Reichstag again. Burgman asserted that supporters of republican government felt Hindenburg was their only hope to “ward off the Nazi danger.” While Burgman’s analysis in the end suggested that Hindenburg would win, it definitely seemed to suggest that Hitler and the Nazis were much more dangerous than others were reporting.  

Even before the roster of candidates had been finalized, there were numerous indications that the political moves in Germany were also leading to more positioning among militarized groups. Worried about the growth of the Nazis, the Social Democrats had organized “the Republican elements of the Left” to form their own armed force, the Iron Front. The group remained poised to act should the situation in Germany require any “other than parliamentary means of defense.” The Iron Front soon began staging forces throughout Germany, particularly at factories and mines, where they protected workers from possible attacks made from the right. And its presence soon led the


149 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 January 1932, 862.00PR/109, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
National Opposition and the Communists to claim that the group was meant to attack their constituencies.\footnote{150}

As the left-leaning elements organized, the National Socialists seemed to have found a few friends within the German government. In a quiet move that seemed to bode well for the potential candidacy of Hitler, General Kurt von Schleicher, an aide and protégé of Minister of Defense Wilhelm Groener, managed to get the ban lifted on Nazi enlistment in the *Reichswehr*. This move meant that only the Communists were banned from joining.\footnote{151} Over the course of the previous year, Schleicher had come to believe that the Nazis shared the goals of the leadership of the German army, which desired a strong centralized government like a dictatorship. If he could “tame” Hitler and the Nazis and get them a position in the government, Schleicher felt he could use them to gain access to their support among the German people.\footnote{152} Sackett had no idea of the extent of contact between Hitler and Schleicher or of Schleicher’s strategy, but he did report to the State Department that he believed that Schleicher had been having conversations with Hitler and the Nazis.\footnote{153}

\footnote{150} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 26 January 1932, 862.00PR/110, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\footnote{151} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 9 February 1932, 862.00PR/111, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


\footnote{153} Sackett to State, 9 February 1932, 862.00PR/111.
American observers continued to work their German contacts to keep informed about who would actually run in the election. In early February, Secretary of State Otto Meissner suggested Hindenburg was both close to a decision and determined to keep Brüning as his chancellor. Friedrich W. von Prittwitz und Gaffron, the German ambassador to the United States, expressed surprise to Undersecretary of State William R. Castle regarding Hitler’s possible intentions to run and contended it was “nonsense” that the Nazi leader would do so because of the citizenship issue. He also discounted Hitler’s ability to garner any votes outside the Nazi Party.

Despite the fact that the election would be held in March, the candidate list did not truly take shape until the second half of February 1932. Hindenburg, citing his “‘responsibility for the fate of our Fatherland,’” made his announcement on 15 February. He had made his decision even though he failed to gain the support of the Nationalists and the Stahlhelm, which threw their support behind Theodor Duesterberg on 22 February. Within days, Brunswick Nazis appointed Hitler to a civil service

154 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 10 February 1932, 862.00/2673, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

155 William R. Castle, “Memorandum of conversation with the German Ambassador,” 11 February 1932, 862.00/2684, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

156 William R. Castle, “Memorandum,” 18 February 1932, 862.00/2685, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

157 John C. Wiley tel to Secretary of State, 15 February 1932, 862.00/2679, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

158 Heiber, The Weimar Republic, 192; Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 447.
position, and the Nazi leader entered the presidential race. Sackett reported that republican leaders had backed off challenging his path to citizenship in order to avoid making Hitler “a political ‘martyr.'”

The information reaching the State Department continued to give varying analysis on the situation. Based in Washington during his hardship leave from Berlin, George Gordon asserted that Hindenburg could win on the first vote, which required an absolute majority among the candidates. But should that fail, he believed it was ‘absolutely assured” that he would win on the second ballot. Gordon also asserted that the Nazis “have taken on more than they bargained for.” And rather than make them more determined to gain control in Germany, Gordon believed that a loss in the election would make them more reasonable about joining the government.

In a rather short time, Americans in Germany had gone from totally discounting the abilities of the National Socialists, to acknowledging that they would at least be able to join the government, to admitting that at most they might take control of the government. The general agreement about the Nazis’ potential that had existed among American officials had started to crack among American officials. Faced once again with the determined actions of the Nazi leaders, U.S. observers struggled to fully comprehend

159 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 447.

160 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 23 February 1932, 862.00/2690, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

161 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 24 February 1932, 862.00/2689, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
the growing strength of the party. So even though their analysis had improved, they continued to underestimate the NSDAP and its leader.

As the 13 March election day approached, American observers watched the campaigns and speculated about the potential results. Sackett believed that the Nazis had “maneuvered themselves into political isolation” due to conflict with the government. Yet, both the ambassador and military intelligence reported that the consensus in Germany was that no candidate would win a majority on the first ballot. It seemed that at last Sackett had begun to understand the allure of Hitler, referencing his “magnetic appeal” among Germans. Yet, he still did not trust the ability of Hitler and the Nazis to play a constructive role in government, stating “should the Nazies [sic] come to power it may be feared that political experiments and economic innovations will be attempted which will have disturbing effects.”

As Germany tallied the votes, it quickly became apparent that Hindenburg would register the highest vote total and in fact, he almost reached the threshold of an outright win via majority vote. His final tally of 49.6 percent of the vote, however, left him just short. Hitler followed with 30 percent. Thälmann, the Communists’ candidate, finished

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162 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 March 1932, 862.00/2693, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Herbert John Burgman, “Summary of the Political Situation,” 3 March 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12025, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

163 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 March 1932, 862.00/2695, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
third with 13 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{164} Despite Hitler’s strong showing, Sackett immediately notified Washington that in the second election “Hindenburg’s final election [was] taken for granted.”\textsuperscript{165} Later, he called Hindenburg’s election “a foregone conclusion.” Sackett conveyed that no one had really expected Hindenburg to come so close to winning it all, but he had received the votes of the moderate right and the middle parties. National Socialist strongholds went for Hitler, but in areas like Hesse, the results showed a decrease in votes for the Nazis. Many republican parties thought that “the Nazi wave has reached its crest.”\textsuperscript{166}

Social Democratic support for Hindenburg had been significant. While the party opposed much of what the president stood for, members had announced their support of the war hero with the specific goal of defeating Hitler and the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{167} Although Sackett pointed out that this support had been crucial in the final election results and acknowledged that the results could easily have been different, he seemed ready to dismiss the Nazis. Sackett claimed that taking on Hindenburg had proven to be unwise and caused a significant “set-back” for the National Socialists. The ambassador

\textsuperscript{164} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 244. 

\textsuperscript{165} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 14 March 1932, 862.00/2691, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. 

\textsuperscript{166} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 14 March 1932, 862.00/2708, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. 

also suggested that most in Germany believed Hindenburg’s lead remained insurmountable and that all the second campaign would do was drain the Nazi coffers.\textsuperscript{168}

The run-off election on 10 April pitted the top three vote-getters, Hindenburg, Hitler, and Thälmann, against each other. To win the second round, one only needed a plurality of the vote.\textsuperscript{169} Sackett seemed surprised when the campaign opened with “vehemence” but noted that since Hindenburg had beaten Hitler by seven million votes, the Nazis had quite a deficit to erase. Yet, even then rather than presenting a plan for Germany, the Nazi campaign focused on “a glorification of Hitler and . . . a repudiation of the charges that their coming into power would lead to chaos and civil war.”\textsuperscript{170}

The results of the presidential election were clear, but they left an uneasy feeling in Germany. Hindenburg won the second round of voting with 53 percent of the vote. Hitler increased his tally to 37 percent.\textsuperscript{171} While Hindenburg won by a large margin, he remained displeased as it had come from the support of moderates and the left, rather than the nationalists on the right.\textsuperscript{172} Sackett believed that there were reasons for the Nazis to be pleased, arguing that the results illustrated that contrary to some German

\textsuperscript{168} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 16 March 1932, 862.00/2706, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{169} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 244.

\textsuperscript{170} Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 6 April 1932, 862.00/2717, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{171} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic}, 246.

\textsuperscript{172} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 449.
opinion, “the crest of the Nazi wave has not been reached.” The ambassador still felt that the establishment of a Third Reich remained “remote.” He now believed, however, that "Hitler could play a dominant part in a Right coalition in the Reich.”

The clear losers in the election were the Communists. Thälmann’s support had slipped to a little over 10 percent of the electorate. So while it had been years in the making, the Nazis had clearly stepped ahead of the Communists in Germany. Yet, Americans in Germany did not seem to be alarmed about their success.

VI

As American officials watched, somewhat in disbelief, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists had risen to national prominence. While they continued to have numerous doubts about its campaign of legality, the events of 1931 and 1932 had led to some reevaluation of the party. This shift occurred due to multiple factors, most beyond the control of the United States. The Nazis had shown that as long as the financial crisis continued in Germany, there would be electoral support for the party as had been shown by continued Nazi success at the local level. In the presidential election, Hitler had proven not only that the party had appeal but that it had a broad base of electoral support. Events forced American observers to shed their preconceived ideas regarding Hitler and

173 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 April 1932, 862.00/2722, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

174 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 449.
the Nazis and led to a growing sense among them that the Nazis were a force to be reckoned with.

Despite the evidence, though, U.S. officials still could not quite get a handle on why the party had become successful. They struggled to understand the appeal of the Nazis. American observers felt the party did not have a legitimate program, that Hitler promised contradictory things to various groups, and that the Nazi leader still did not fit their image of a statesman. But the events of the period demonstrated that they were beginning to foresee what could develop in Germany. Ambassador Sackett contemplated Nazi participation in a coalition government. Military intelligence speculated about the establishment of a Nazi dictatorship. While they remained unsure, the fall of the Brüning government in May 1932 would lead to even more turmoil.
Chapter 7

Taken by Surprise: U.S. Officials Unprepared for the Success of the Nazis

I

Following years of underestimating the strength of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, American officials exhibited a somewhat better grasp of the situation by 1932. The events of 1931 and the presidential election of 1932 illustrated that the National Socialist success in the Reichstag elections of 1930 had not been a fluke. Nor did U.S. officials believe that the party’s popularity had yet peaked. After Adolf Hitler’s second place finish to Paul von Hindenburg in the April run-off election, Ambassador Frederic Sackett informed the State Department “that the Nazi movement is still in the ascendant,” a claim that the fall of the Brüning government in late May 1932 seemed to reinforce.¹ But doubts arose after Nazi support appeared to level off in the July elections for the Reichstag and mounted when the NSDAP began engaging in acts of terrorism in the streets of Germany. As U.S. officials attempted to comprehend the relationship between the party and the government of Brüning’s successor, Franz von Papen, the overall

¹ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 21 April 1932, 862.00/2728, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
confusion increased as the party suffered losses in the Reichstag elections of November 1932. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis would then prove to be more resourceful and resilient than expected.

After the November election, members of the American embassy attempted to provide the State Department with a comprehensive understanding of numerous political issues developing in Germany. More so than during any earlier period, the political turmoil seemed destined to spiral into chaos. Just as the embassy staff provided details on one pressing issue, another matter emerged and every occasion seemed to involve the National Socialists. The initial German governmental response to Hitler’s strong showing in the presidential election appeared to be a motivated determination to limit the party’s ability to be a political factor. After covering raids on Nazi headquarters in Prussia and a nationwide ban on the paramilitary organizations of the party, American observers noted that the National Socialists continued to make gains in state elections. They also became more aware of the constant behind-the-scenes political maneuvering that led not only to the fall of the Brüning government in May but also to two different chancellors and cabinets before the end of the year.

As had been the case in the past, American officials in Germany exhibited the ability to accurately report on national events. Their timely dispatches provided descriptive coverage of election returns, political meetings, nationwide disturbances, and the struggle to establish a stable government. But when events in Germany made analysis imperative, particularly during the last months of 1932, their reporting faltered. The lack of analysis had been enough of an ongoing problem that the State Department
reminded the embassy of its importance in an August 1932 telegram. In the short term, the dispatches improved and State received extended predictions and scrutiny of the National Socialists and the German government. By the time Hitler engineered his appointment to the chancellorship, however, the quality of analysis had once again begun to suffer.

II

American officials had begun their coverage of the presidential election asserting that Adolf Hitler did not have the ability to do well and that his party had no serious chance to influence the formation of a government in Germany. Sackett doubted Hitler’s political competence, but as the campaign progressed, he noted Hitler’s “magnetic appeal.” Although the embassy staff took more notice of the leader and his party when Hitler increased his vote in the run-off, they still believed that, at best, the party could hope to join a coalition of the right. Even when American observers attempted to provide an overall analysis of the party’s strength, they continued to downplay the possibility of Nazi dominance. As American officials struggled to understand both the short- and long-term significance of the Nazi success, leaders in Germany split on their overall view of

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2 William R. Castle tel to American Embassy, Berlin, 15 August 1932, 862.00/2821A, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

3 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 March 1932, 862.00/2695, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
the party as well, further complicating any efforts to understand it. On one side were those who viewed the NSDAP as a threat to parliamentary government; on the other, those who had begun believing that perhaps some sort of cooperative arrangement needed to be made with it.

The fear that the National Socialists represented more of an imminent danger first expressed itself among governmental officials in Prussia during the presidential campaign. Prussian Minister of the Interior Carl Severing had clashed with the National Socialists earlier when he had served in the same position for the Reich.\(^4\) Believing the NSDAP to be plotting against the state, Severing launched raids of Nazi headquarters shortly after the first round of the presidential election in March 1932.\(^5\) In particular, he believed the Nazis had been poised to travel to Berlin en masse had Hitler won the first round of voting.\(^6\)

John Wiley, the counselor of the embassy, kept the State Department abreast of events but seemed dismissive of the actions taken against the Nazis. He reported that during the raids, Berlin police allegedly found Nazi plans to launch a siege on the city. Wiley claimed that announcements like this had been made in the past and had come to nothing. He speculated that the Social Democratic-led government made the claims to

\(^4\) When serving as the minister of the interior for Weimar, Severing had clashed with the Nazis over Wilhelm Frick’s actions in Thuringia. See chapter five.


\(^6\) John C. Wiley to Secretary of State, 23 March 1932, 862.00/2710, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
influence the upcoming state elections in Prussia. Wiley went on to assert that even if the allegations were true, they would not lead to any consequences, a claim he defended by reference to the Boxheim documents.\(^7\)

Even after publication of some of the seized material, Ambassador Sackett supported Wiley’s assertions. Severing had published several confiscated documents to provide justification for the raids and continued to assert that the Nazis had been preparing to take over Berlin by force.\(^8\) The seized matter detailed how the SA would take arms from *Reichswehr* arsenals to facilitate their coup.\(^9\) Sackett contended that the material published seemed to suggest that Severing had been correct. But while it described a potential violent undertaking by the NSDAP, the ambassador thought the party could justify its actions because its enemies, including the Iron Front, had made threats against it.\(^10\)

Wiley and Sackett proved correct in predicting that the disclosures would not have a dramatic impact on Hitler’s campaign. But they failed to examine the larger concern regarding the party’s military capacity and its potential ability to seize power. This omission seemed even more significant when a nationwide ban of the Nazis’ paramilitary organizations followed Hindenburg’s reelection.

\(^7\) Wiley to State, 23 March 1932, 862.00/2710.

\(^8\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 7 April 1932, 862.00/2715, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


\(^10\) Sackett to State, 7 April 1932, 862.00/2715.
Brüning had long tried to keep the National Socialists at arm’s length. After the election, he was even more motivated to limit the potential national influence of the Nazis with the aid of his minister of defense, Wilhelm Groener.\footnote{William L. Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 248.} Groener had been concerned about the paramilitary units of the NSDAP and had believed in the need to dissolve the SA since 1931.\footnote{Gordon A. Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1928-1932,” Political Science Quarterly 63 (Jun., 1948): 212.} In 1932, the ministers of the interior in six German states urged Groener to act.\footnote{Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 144-45.} After consulting with, and gaining the support of, his army chiefs, he recommended to Brüning that Hindenburg issue an emergency decree banning both the SA and the SS.\footnote{Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism,” 220-22.} Brüning worried such a move would aid the Nazis in the upcoming state elections at the end of April, but agreed because it had the support of leaders of the army and navy. Hindenburg initially consented when informed that both the Reichswehr and the state governments supported the measure, subsequently faltered, and ultimately agreed, but only after Groener promised he would take “full responsibility” for the ban.\footnote{Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 144-45; Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism,” 222.} Announced in mid-April, the order not only banned the Nazis’ paramilitary organizations but also attempted to limit their ability to reconstitute
themselves. As part of the decree, Groener ordered the police to confiscate any members’ possessions that could be construed as being military in nature. 

While the ban included all paramilitary organizations, the true focus had been the SA, which had grown to 400,000 members by 1932. Despite the assurances given to Hindenburg, leaders of the Reichswehr had not fully supported the elimination of the SA. General Kurt von Schleicher, who led the army’s political unit, had started gathering information about the NSDAP in October 1931 and had gone as far as to meet with party members. He had come to believe that the leaders of the Reichswehr might be able to use the National Socialists to create a strong, centralized government. Groener and Brüning had initially convinced him to support the ban before it had been announced. Schleicher, however, soon reversed his position, turning against the ban even before the government announced it. When it became apparent that he could not halt the pronouncement, he moved quickly to undermine it. When he could not convince the government to give the National Socialists a week’s notice, Schleicher provided advance notice of the measure to sympathetic Reichswehr commanders. In addition, he made sure to warn the Nazis of the imminent ban. The early warning allowed the SA to empty their headquarters of documentation and many of their weapons, but due to the broad confiscation order, they lost uniforms, vehicles, party banners, and many other items.

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16 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 247-51.
19 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 251.
Additionally, the SA had actually been training with some Reichswehr units in eastern Germany, although Hitler halted the cooperation with the ban.\textsuperscript{20} Sackett remained unconvinced that the measures would result in the true dismantling of the SA. Upon news of the order, he speculated that the organization would just be “reformed in the guise of [a] sport organization.”\textsuperscript{21} While Sackett did not know of Schleicher’s warning, he reported that the Nazi units had successfully hidden much of their documentary evidence before the police arrived. Most viewed the ban as a direct assault on the NSDAP, but Sackett believed that it might not have been “entirely unwelcome.” The ambassador felt that after two presidential campaigns, funding for the SA would have been difficult to find. He also believed that many in the SA “were tired of waiting” for the establishment of the Third Reich, and that the ban effectively helped Hitler silence the growing dissatisfaction. Additionally, once the SA no longer existed, Sackett speculated it would be easier for the Nazis to join coalition governments at the national and state level.\textsuperscript{22} He may have reached his conclusions due to the mild Nazi response to the measure, as there were no violent confrontations or frenzied speeches denouncing the government’s actions.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 145.
\item[21] Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 14 April 1932, 862.00/2712, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\item[22] Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 19 April 1932, 862.00/2729, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\item[23] Sackett to State, 21 April 1932, 862.00/2728.
\end{footnotes}
Perhaps due to their focus on the size and strength of Nazi paramilitary groups, military intelligence held a different view than the embassy. Herbert Burgman took a historical approach in examining the ban. He pointed out that the German government had long tolerated paramilitary groups like the *Freikorps* and other right-wing organizations to battle communism and also because the Weimar Constitution emphasized toleration. This situation had allowed the Nazis to have organizations like the SA, which had grown as economic conditions deteriorated. Yet, Hitler’s budding popularity as the presidential election neared had made the parties in power “shiver in their shoes” as they had come to believe that should Hitler win, his units would seize full control despite the Nazi leader’s promises to proceed legally. Burgman speculated that fears of a potential Nazi takeover led the parties in power to support Hindenburg’s reelection; once Hitler lost the election, the government believed it safe to disband the organizations.  

This analysis accurately reflected the positions of Brüning and Groener, but it failed to include a larger understanding of all the forces at play. Burgman did acknowledge, however, that the political momentum favored Hitler as he contended that the question that remained unanswered was whether the measure had come “too late to prevent Hitler’s ascension to power.”

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24 Herbert John Burgman, “Dissolution of the Military Organizations of the Nazi Party by Executive Order,” 21 April 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12122, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Less than two weeks after the emergency decree, elections would be held in Prussia. Brüning supported the ban despite his fears that it would lead voters to view the Nazis as political martyrs. U.S. military intelligence also believed the Prussian elections to be significant, suggesting that should the NSDAP gain control of the government, the elections would have proven to be a turning point in the history of National Socialism. 26 In fact, five Länder were holding elections for their state parliaments. 27 The collective results illustrated that the Nazi wave had not crested.

In all but one of the states holding elections, the Nazis became the largest party. 28 In Prussia, where they formerly held 9 seats in the state parliament, their total jumped to 162 and they became the largest party. With the exception of the Communists, every other party lost seats. Despite the significant increase, the results were not as dramatic as many in the German government had feared. With a total of 423 seats in the body, the Nazis fell well short of a majority. Even by combining with like-minded parties on the right, they only controlled 200 seats. 29 While the gains had not launched the National Socialists into control of Prussia, the collective results at the state level illustrated that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis continued to increase their supporters.


28 The exception was Bavaria, where the Bavarian People’s Party eeked out a two seat advantage over the Nazis. Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 450.

Following the presidential and state elections, Ambassador Sackett attempted to explain the political situation in Germany and the specific place of the National Socialists within it to the State Department. He noted that effectively only four political groups dominated Germany: the Nazis; the Centrists; the Social Democrats; and the Communists. At both the state and national level, the questions included who the National Socialists would work with and what they would be able to do. Nationally, the Center Party continued to hesitate when it came to cooperating with Nazis, requesting assurances that the NSDAP would continue to follow legal means. Sackett believed that the Nazis were strategically positioning themselves to play the major role in the government but felt that Brüning would be fine at least until the Lausanne Conference on reparations scheduled for June. Sackett also noted the new approach taken by the Nazis in Prussia. Even though it had not secured majority control, the party argued that it should still take over the positions of power in the state government. The NSDAP would later adapt this tactic to the national level.

American observers closely monitored the National Socialists following the presidential election. While Hitler had not been elected president, the results and subsequent events illustrated that he had positioned his party in the center of the political

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30 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 3 May 1932, 862.00/2742, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

31 The Lausanne Conference had been called by the British and originally scheduled for January. Brüning had postponed it until June due to the turmoil in Germany. Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 215-16; Sackett to State, 3 May 1932, 862.00/2742.

32 Sackett to State, 3 May 1932, 862.00/2742.
situation throughout the Reich. In their concern to document the actions of the NSDAP, U.S. officials had not fully noticed the weakening position of the Brüning government.

III

The Brüning government had already been in a precarious position. The last Reichstag vote of confidence in October 1931 had narrowly passed, 295 to 270; then the Reichstag had adjourned until February 1932. The presidential election seemingly helped the chancellor as he continued to have the support of President Hindenburg. But the dramatic showing of Hitler and the continued electoral success of the Nazis at the state level proved to be a concern. While American officials continued to document the situation, they failed to grasp the gravity of Brüning’s position.

The rapidly unfolding state of affairs continued when the Reichstag convened on 9 May in what proved to be a short session dominated by a great deal of chaos. As soon as it opened, Nazi deputies, including Gregor Strasser and Hermann Göring, took control of the floor to expound Nazi ideals and criticisms of the recent turn of events. Strasser focused on the party’s economic program. Göring harangued the body regarding the ban on paramilitary organizations, claiming that the government, and Groener in particular, had eliminated the forces that had successfully halted the spread of communism in

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33 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of Weimar Republic, 197.
In his speech, Göring also directly appealed to the members of the Reichswehr to oppose their leader.\(^{35}\)

The Nazis had been targeting Groener since the mid-April ban of their paramilitary organizations via a “whispering campaign.”\(^{36}\) Schleicher and other members of the Reichswehr leadership, who had opposed the dismantling of the SA, moved to force the resignation of Groener and hoped to “undermine” Brüning.\(^{37}\) When Göring directly challenged him from the Reichstag, Groener stood to defend his actions while being heckled by the Nazi delegates.\(^{38}\) Groener argued that the ban had become necessary because Nazi forces “represented a danger to the authority” of the government.\(^{39}\) But Schleicher had already convinced Hindenburg that Groener no longer had the support of the Reichswehr. The situation led to the forced resignation of the minister of defense.\(^{40}\) While the Nazis had helped to drive him from his position, Groener retained his post as minister of the interior, the department responsible for enforcement of the ban.\(^{41}\)

\(^{34}\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{35}\) Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism,” 225.

\(^{36}\) Sackett to State, 3 May 1932, 862.00/2742.


\(^{38}\) Craig, “Reichswehr and National Socialism,” 225.

\(^{39}\) Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.

\(^{40}\) Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 145.

\(^{41}\) Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.
But the Nazi offensive had just begun. Within days, the Nazis, Nationalists, and Communists moved to bring down Brüning’s government from their position in the Reichstag. On 12 May, they forced a vote of confidence, which Brüning barely secured with a tally of 287 to 257.42 Coinciding with the actual vote, the National Socialists created a disturbance elsewhere in the Reichstag building as a group of Nazis attacked a former party member who had joined the Social Democrats.43 The disorder led to the adjournment of the Reichstag until 6 June.44

Despite their behavior in the Reichstag, Sackett claimed the Nazis were “moderating” their beliefs. He asserted that it had become “evident” that the party had made preparations to begin cooperating with the Center Party. The ambassador also viewed Groener’s resignation as a sign that a new “political constellation” would form since “a partial cabinet crisis” had been created.45 The raids in Prussia and the banning of the SA illustrated that apprehension about the NSDAP existed in Germany. Yet, after the Nazis successfully caused a ruckus in the Reichstag and helped force Groener’s resignation, Sackett believed they were moderating their stance and could soon be participating in a coalition government.

42 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 12 May 1932, 862.00/2741, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

43 According to Sackett, the former Nazi had also “published a brochure accusing various Nazi leaders of private irregularities or of homosexual propensities.” Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.

44 Sackett tel to State, 12 May 1932, 862.00/2741.

45 Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.
Then, unexpectedly for American observers, Heinrich Brüning’s support fell apart. At the close of the Reichstag session, Sackett contended that Brüning had been confident and shown “considerable” success, although he did note that “the tactical position of his Government is at the nadir.”\textsuperscript{46} With no direct warning in his previous dispatches, Sackett reported on 30 May that Brüning had informed him that his government would resign.\textsuperscript{47} And within the hour, he informed Washington that Hindenburg had accepted the resignation.\textsuperscript{48} Buried in his dispatch following the adjournment of the Reichstag, Sackett had mentioned that the government had only one advantage in the chaos, the backing of the \textit{Reichswehr}. He had also dismissed a rumor that Schleicher might supplant Brüning as chancellor. Yet he believed that a major change would not occur because of the rapidly approaching Lausanne Conference.\textsuperscript{49} American officials had clearly failed to fully understand the forces at play between \textit{Reichswehr} leaders, Brüning, and Hindenburg.

In fact, Brüning’s preparations for the Lausanne Conference and the worsening budget situation in Germany had been major factors in the events that followed. Brüning believed that to have a strong hand at the upcoming reparations conference his proposals

\textsuperscript{46} Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.

\textsuperscript{47} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 30 May 1932, 862.00/2757, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{48} Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 30 May 1932, 862.00/2758, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{49} Sackett to State, 18 May 1932, 862.032/22.
to improve the domestic economic situation needed Hindenburg’s approval. Additionally, he wanted a public vote of confidence from the president. Hindenburg considered Brüning’s budget ideas while vacationing at his East Prussian estate; upon his return, he indicated his opposition to them. Brüning’s plans, which included the elimination of agricultural subsidies paid to the owners of Prussian estates, had upset many of Hindenburg’s friends, and led them to oppose the chancellor. Hindenburg had also been influenced by a growing group of government leaders who opposed Brüning and were in favor of working with, or at least using, the right-wing political parties. Kurt von Schleicher spearheaded the push, but received help from Otto Meissner and Hindenburg’s son, Oskar von Hindenburg. Additionally, Schleicher had actively begun looking for a new chancellor. On 30 May, Brüning attempted again to obtain a vote of confidence from Hindenburg. When that failed, he resigned along with his entire cabinet.

As the negotiations began for the new government, Sackett revealed just how unprepared the embassy had been for this eventuality. He reported that Hindenburg’s support of Brüning seemed assured when the president left for vacation. At most, the ambassador had believed that cabinet changes might come in the near future. He further

50 Wheeler-Bennett, “The German Political Situation,” 463-64.
53 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 266-69.
54 Wheeler-Bennett, “The German Political Situation,” 463-64.
insisted that even when Hindenburg returned, it appeared that Brüning was secure. Sackett acknowledged that although there had been some rumors shortly before Brüning’s resignation, the government had denied them. Sackett blamed Hindenburg’s Prussian friends for instigating the change. He believed that they had become disheartened by Brüning’s policies, which had been shaped by the chancellor’s dependence on the support of Social Democrats. Brüning had also informed the ambassador that as he headed into the Lausanne Conference, he wanted Hindenburg to express his support to ensure better standing at the meeting. In talks together the night of 28 May, Brüning expressed confidence that he had the support of the president. But only two days later, Brüning summoned Sackett to his office to let him know he would be resigning. When Hindenburg denied his support, the chancellor believed that he had no other choice.

Caught unaware of the events leading to the fall of the Brüning cabinet, American officials sprung to action to try to fully discern the political conditions. Not only did dispatches from Germany increase in volume but they also contained extended analysis

55 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

56 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 8 June 1932, 862.00/2793, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

57 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.

58 Sackett to State, 8 June 1932, 862.00/2793.

59 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.
of the government and speculation regarding the future of the NSDAP. Even as Ambassador Sackett and observers in Germany painted a confusing political scene, the State Department pressed them for more material. Additionally, Washington-based members of the State Department increasingly relied on their own contacts to gain information.

With the unsettled conditions in Berlin, U.S. policymakers first focused on the selection of a new chancellor and the creation of the new cabinet. Even before explaining the causes of Brüning’s downfall to the State Department, Sackett predicted that the new government would shift to the political right. The German press speculated that Hindenburg would form an interim cabinet of individuals personally close to him. Then, to guarantee a government that was reflective of the German population, new Reichstag elections would follow.60 U.S. observers soon discovered that Hindenburg had charged Franz von Papen with the task of forming a new cabinet.

The speed with which the new government began forming convinced Sackett that the coup against Brüning must have been prepared in advance specifically to produce a “swerve” to the right.61 The new chancellor, Franz von Papen, came from the “extreme Right wing of the Center Party.” After reporting a tentative list of cabinet members, Sackett noted that “the personnel of the new Cabinet is strongly indicative of a military

60 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 31 May 1932, 862.00/2762, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

61 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.
dictatorship in close cooperation with national groups.”

The majority of cabinet members were noblemen and not members of political parties. Hindenburg heralded a government for “National Concentration,” a term that Sackett asserted had never been used in Germany before and was left undefined. It did not include any Nazis, but Sackett believed that they had been promised new Reichstag elections. The news that Kurt von Schleicher would be appointed minister of defense further supported Sackett’s theory of advance planning, since someone who had been “intriguing” against the Brüning government now held a position of power. While the ambassador had been caught unprepared when it occurred, Sackett now assigned responsibility for the coup d’état to Schleicher.

His surprise at Brüning’s fall notwithstanding, Sackett struggled more in trying to understand why Franz von Papen had been chosen as the new chancellor. At best, he could only assert that Papen had been selected due to a lack of a better alternative. Part of the shock stemmed from the new chancellor’s past. Papen had served as Germany’s military attaché in Washington for a short period during World War I but had been forced to leave in December 1915 after the Wilson administration suspected him of planning

62 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2766, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

63 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.

64 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.

65 Sackett to State, 8 June 1932, 862.00/2793.

66 Sackett to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2781.
acts of sabotage. Sackett did not know much about Papen other than that, so he asked
the State Department if they had “any special instructions.” Stimson responded that
Sackett should “deal with him politely but somewhat distantly.” The secretary of state
believed there could be difficulties because two sabotage cases linked to Papen were still
being litigated.

With Papen as chancellor, the question for American observers, and for many
Germans themselves, became where the National Socialists would fit. As Franz von
Papen assembled a very inexperienced cabinet, Brüning warned him that should the SA
ban be revoked, the Nazis could potentially be a divisive force. In the meantime, U.S.
military intelligence revealed that more members of the Reichswehr were beginning to
support Hitler. Military Attaché Jacob Wuest reported that some officers believed there
were only two options to deal with the situation: the creation of a dictatorship or a return
to a monarchy. Military intelligence believed that the Papen government planned to
compromise with the Nazis in order to decrease the party’s “radicalism.” Wuest deemed
the situation in Germany critical, with “quick decisions” necessary.

67 Margot Louria, Triumph and Downfall: America’s Pursuit of Peace and Prosperity, 1921-1933
(Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001), 212.

68 Sackett tel to State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2766.

69 Henry L. Stimson tel to Frederic M. Sackett, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2766, Records of the Department of
State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives,
Washington, D.C.

70 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 270-71.

71 Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Political Developments,” 30 June 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports,
Germany 1919-1941, Report #12258, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records
of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The State Department had previously expressed considerable interest in the rise of the National Socialists, but the unexpected downfall of the Brüning government and the disorder that followed spurred it to become more involved. Citing “anxiety” over the political situation in Germany, Secretary of State Henry Stimson surveyed the coverage of events in American newspapers. He discovered no clear-cut view as some reports suggested that the new government had risen to act as a block against Hitler’s rising power while others seemed to see the new cabinet as a return to the prewar days.  

Despite his presence in Germany, Sackett could not provide Stimson with a full understanding of the situation either. He suggested that the Papen government was meant to represent the creation of a new right bloc that would become a long-term solution for Germany, a view buttressed by the fact that he had been informed that Hitler remained “averse to taking over power for a considerable time.” Sackett’s German sources also indicated that there were no Nazis in the cabinet as Hitler understood that his party had “no proper Cabinet material available.”

State Department efforts to comprehend the political situation led more officials to investigate and provide their own analyses of the state of affairs. Their efforts often muddled the already complicated situation. Despite the fact that the American reports emanating from Germany rarely gave weight to an imminent return of the monarchy,

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72 Henry L. Stimson tel to American Embassy, Berlin, 3 June 1932, 862.00/2775A, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

73 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 4 June 1932, 862.00/2775, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Pierre de Lagarde Boal, chief of Western European Affairs, contended in a letter to Stimson that upon consultation with consular officers in Germany, he had concluded that the monarchy would be reestablished shortly. His inquiries led him to believe that no one wanted Hitler as chancellor or president and that the Nazi leader had not “shown any inclination to assume responsibility himself.” In fact, Boal predicted that the “Hitlerites” would work to avoid elections “possibly by a coup d’état calculated to lead to the restoration of some member of the Imperial family.”

When Sackett directly contradicted him, Boal disregarded the ambassador’s opinion. Prior to delivery of his report, Boal added in a handwritten note that he had talked to Ambassador Sackett, who had asserted that “a restoration of the monarchy” would be “improbable” and that he instead “expected something like a dictatorship.” Boal disagreed, asserting that the ambassador hoped to please the department since “a return of the Hohenzollerns would not be popular in [the United States.]” In reality, while Sackett had been struggling, he clearly had a better understanding of the circumstances than Boal. Some members of the Reichswehr still expressed a desire for the monarchy, but it had been years since its return had actually been discussed. And while questions remained about the NSDAP, Sackett’s previous dispatches had shown that although they may have been hesitant to assume power immediately, they remained active and seemingly working toward more influence. Yet, the chief of a State

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74 Pierre de Lagarde Boal to Secretary of State, 4 June 1932, 862.00/2787, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

75 Boal to State, 4 June 1932, 862.00/2787.
Department division could tell his superior that the National Socialists were uninterested in power and would potentially risk a coup to install a monarch. Clearly, Washington-based officials failed to help develop an accurate understanding of Hitler and the Nazis.

Other officials also worked their contacts. During a discussion with Friedrich W. von Prittwitz und Gaffron, the German ambassador, Secretary of State Stimson directly asked him whether military groups had influenced Hindenburg’s actions in accepting Brüning’s resignation. Prittwitz believed that probably had been the case, but he had no evidence. He also felt that Hindenburg had acted quickly in forming a new cabinet due to fears of the growing strength of the Nazis. With a new government and new elections to follow, Prittwitz speculated that Hindenburg believed the government would continue to operate within the guidelines of the constitution.76

Undersecretary of State William Castle followed up with the German ambassador, directly questioning him regarding the restoration of the monarchy in Germany. Prittwitz replied “with great vigor” that his country would never accept such a course. Additionally, he stressed that should Hitler come out in favor of a monarchy, the Nazis would lose support. The German ambassador did echo previous reports, though, that Hitler remained unwilling to take on the responsibility of being a part of the government.77 Much like Sackett in Germany, State Department officials struggled to

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76 Henry L. Stimson, “Memorandum,” 6 June 1932, 862.00/2780, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

77 William R. Castle, “Memorandum,” 6 June 1932, 862.00/2791, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
fully understand the situation. In some cases, their sources proved to be on target, such as Prittwitz’s contention that the government did not seek to restore the monarchy. Gaining an understanding of what the potential next moves would be for Hitler and the National Socialists remained a problem.

IV

In reality, the National Socialists continued to follow the same blueprint they had been using the last few years. The party campaigned at the state level, opposed the government in power, and prepared for Reichstag elections. The Nazis also worked to place themselves at the center of any debate about the governing of Germany. As they did so, American observers reported dutifully and attempted to determine whether the Papen government’s actions were in reaction to the growing strength of the Nazis or if the two sides were secretly working together.

Throughout the turmoil following Brüning’s fall, the Nazis worked to maintain their momentum in state elections. Sackett reported that Nazi success continued to some degree. In the state of Oldenburg, the Nazis garnered 24 of the 46 seats in the Diet. Because Oldenburg had already been a Nazi stronghold, however, Sackett did not believe the results could be used to gauge the nation’s feelings toward the party.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 June 1932, 862.00/2782, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
For their part, the Nazis had also begun working to expand their support by explaining their economic program for Germany. Gregor Strasser had jumpstarted the move with a speech before the Reichstag on 10 May in which he claimed that the party had gained strength specifically because the state had pursued a faulty economic program. Sackett reported that as described, the program emphasized the expansion of credit to create public works projects and the institution of obligatory labor.\footnote{Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 7 June 1932, 862.00/2785, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} The process had started with Strasser’s speech before the Reichstag, but the party acknowledged that a need existed to reach out to the German people. In Berlin, the Nazis established a school to explain the party’s economic program via a succession of lectures. Sackett informed the State Department that no new ideas were being developed and that rather the school had party leaders explaining their economic ideas, albeit often in vague terms.\footnote{Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 19 May 1932, 862.00/2761, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.} The ambassador tended to be rather dismissive of the Nazi grasp of the economy. He felt that their elucidation of their economic policy illustrated “the lack of sophistication of the Nazi leaders in most matters except in the field of demagogic politics.”\footnote{Sackett to State, 7 June 1932, 862.00/2785.}

The real focus of the party remained national politics, where the new Papen cabinet seemed to be following through with some of the steps necessary to potentially
bring the National Socialists into a government coalition. Citing a journalist who had recently met with Papen, Jacob Wuest reported that the government had gained the support of the National Socialists by promising both new elections for the Reichstag and the repeal of the ban on Nazi paramilitary organizations. And that first promise had been fulfilled as Franz von Papen had dissolved the Reichstag on 4 June and scheduled new elections for the end of July.

The new Papen government did not have much time to deal with Germany’s economic situation. The new chancellor issued an emergency decree on 14 June that included many of the economic plans Brüning had initially proposed. One measure led to a “means test” in order to extend unemployment insurance beyond six weeks. The decree not surprisingly led to a decrease in support for the government. Papen’s next move would also cost him some support, but it benefited the Nazis.

Whether from a promise the chancellor had made to the National Socialists or from his lack of support in the Reichstag, Papen decided to rescind the SA ban on 16 June. Almost immediately, Sackett notified the State Department of political disturbances throughout the country. In fact, 17 June became known as “Bloody

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82 Wuest, “Political Developments,” 30 June 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12258.

83 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 274.

84 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 276.

85 Mitchell, Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic, 146.

86 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 20 June 1932, 862.00/2797, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Sunday” due to all the violent clashes that occurred once the SA returned to the streets.\textsuperscript{87} Without delay in areas that submitted to the new ordinance, like Prussia, clashes took place between uniformed Nazis and their political opponents. But some states tried to take matters into their own hands.\textsuperscript{88}

Numerous South German states responded to the lifting of the ban by announcing they would revert to enforcement of existing state laws that prohibited political groups from wearing uniforms. The NSDAP responded by “parad[ing] in their new uniforms in violation of existing regulations.” When state police moved to arrest demonstrators and confiscate uniforms, violence and arrests ensued. Bavaria, the original home of the National Socialists, witnessed several disturbances. Nazi deputies showed up for a meeting to the Diet clad in their uniforms. The Bavarian government responded by expelling the entire delegation for twenty days.\textsuperscript{89}

The tension between the South German states and the NSDAP continued brewing as the party ramped up its campaign for the new Reichstag elections. The Papen government permitted the National Socialists to broadcast over the wireless nationwide. The South German states, which had already moved to enforce state laws about uniforms, however, refused to allow the National Socialists to use their radio stations.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87} Mitchell, \textit{Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic}, 146.

\textsuperscript{88} Sackett to State, 20 June 1932, 862.00/2797.

\textsuperscript{89} Sackett to State, 20 June 1932, 862.00/2797.

\textsuperscript{90} Sackett to State, 20 June 1932, 862.00/2797.
No matter what the Papen government did, it failed to secure a better footing. The government’s efforts at the Lausanne Conference helped lead to reparations payments being cancelled, yet the Papen cabinet still suffered.\(^91\) It also led to less support for Papen’s government among the traditional republican parties. Both the Bavarian People’s Party and the Center Party opposed the new government. Sackett contended that the government stood “completely isolated, without visible political support.”\(^92\) Military intelligence also reported that it appeared as if the government had no support.\(^93\) Despite benefiting under the Papen regime, the NSDAP continued to campaign as an opposition party.

In late June, the Papen government took another step that seemed to bode well for Hitler and the Nazis. Claiming that Carl Severing and the Social Democrats allowed political violence to escalate unchecked in Prussia, Franz von Papen convinced Hindenburg to use Article 48 of the constitution to remove the state government.\(^94\) The president then appointed the chancellor the Reich Commissioner for Prussia, which allowed Papen to control the government there.\(^95\) In addition to removing Social


\(^92\) Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 13 July 1932, 862.00PR/114, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^93\) Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Recent Political Events,” 18 July 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12289, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^94\) Patch, *Heinrich Brünning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic*, 278.

Democratic ministers, the action also led to the removal of Berlin’s chief of police.\(^96\) George Gordon informed State that the step had been taken because the government believed that the Prussian authorities had not done enough to contain “disturbances provoked by Communists,” that they had been “intentionally lax.”\(^97\)

Republican parties and trade unions challenged this action throughout Germany. Some blamed the National Socialists for the violence, a charge the chancellor dismissed. As Gordon reported Papen’s justifications, he speculated that the move had come as part of an agreement between the Nazis and the chancellor.\(^98\) Once Papen took over, the Nazis pretty much received free reign in the streets as the Social Democrats had lost their position of power.\(^99\)

American observers believed that in numerous instances the Papen government had acted in concert with the National Socialists. The evidence, however, remained slim. Uncertainty about what had happened and what would happen filled U.S. reports and memoranda. As American officials struggled to understand the course of events in Germany, the National Socialists had come ever closer to gaining the reins of government. In this unsettled period, Germans went to the polls at the end of July to elect new delegates to the Reichstag.


\(^97\) George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 25 July 1932, 862.00/2815, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^98\) Gordon to State, 25 July 1932, 862.00/2815.

\(^99\) Mitchell, *Hitler’s Stormtroopers and the Attack on the German Republic*, 146-47.
The political situation in Germany had become no clearer as the 31 July 1932 Reichstag elections neared. In many ways, it seemed that there had been constant campaigning in Germany for the first half of the year, first for the presidential campaign and then to elect new delegates to parliament. The political violence that had begun with the lifting of the SA ban continued right up to the election. While the election results were not the windfall the Nazis hoped for, the NSDAP would become the largest party in the Reichstag. Afterwards, it took to the streets to increase its visibility. While believing that the party planned to join the ruling government, American officials began growing more concerned about the NSDAP’s tactics, calling them “acts of terrorism.”

As the campaigning got under way, Secretary of State Stimson spoke with the German ambassador to try to understand the justification for another round of elections. Prittwitz contended that Hindenburg believed that national sentiment had shifted to the right in Germany and that the government needed to change as well. In particular, new elections needed to be held so that the parliament would truly represent the population. But Prittwitz seemed convinced that the results would not cause undue consternation. He

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100 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 9 August 1932, 862.00/2827, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
believed that the National Socialists were losing support in their traditional strongholds, southern Germany, but gaining in Prussia and northern Germany.  

American observers were not necessarily seeing the same thing in Germany. In the weeks prior to the election, American observers noted the country’s “confused” political situation. Sackett reported that most political parties campaigned against the Papen government, although he noted that many Germans believed that the public denunciations of the Papen cabinet were just a ploy to gain votes. Not surprisingly, the NSDAP led the attacks on the government, including verbal assaults on members of the cabinet and street demonstrations. As the election neared, the Nazi demonstrations intensified. Wuest stated that in a two-week period there had been twenty-one deaths. U.S. military intelligence maintained that the disturbances had escalated once the Nazis resumed wearing their uniforms.

In fact, the reliance on public displays, aggression, and the threat of potential violence dominated Nazi actions. George Gordon seemed annoyed by the lack of content covered in the Nazi campaign, asserting that “activities appealing to the eye rather than to reason” had dominated. In particular that had meant numerous public demonstrations


102 Sackett to State, 13 July 1932, 862.00PR/114; Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Recent Political Events,” 18 July 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12289.

103 Sackett to State, 13 July 1932, 862.00PR/114.

and street parades. Wuest also noted the actions of the Nazis. Military intelligence monitored the party closely because the Nazis had been mobilizing troops in preparation for clashes following the election. Due to concerns regarding the rising level of violence, on 29 July, the Papen government banned political rallies through the first ten days of August.

In order to gain a better understanding of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, military intelligence also sent John Hinemon, Jr., the assistant military attaché, to a Nazi campaign rally in Berlin stadium the night of 27 July. The stadium seated about 65,000 people and by the time the meeting commenced, it had been filled with ardent supporters jamming the aisles. Hinemon’s description covered the processions, an address by Joseph Goebbels, and a “torch light parade” in which uniformed Nazis marched in and surrounded the arena. All of this had been completed in two hours before Hitler was scheduled to speak. The Nazi leader arrived 45 minutes late and Hinemon noted the crowd’s “discipline and self-control which indicated the earnestness with which they have embraced the Nazi movement.”

105 George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 27 July 1932, 862.00PR/115, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


108 John H. Hinemon, Jr., Assistant Military Attaché, “Political Meeting of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazis),” 30 July 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12316, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Like the last meeting attended by an American military representative, Hinemon seemed particularly focused on who attended and how they behaved. He believed that most of the people present seemed to be of the middle classes and that based on their “appearance, conduct, and bearing” they were “substantial, thinking citizens,” who watched and responded to Hitler “almost with reverence.” Hinemon understood them to be focused on supporting someone who would get them out of the depression, not people who went for “mob violence.” And they listened to Hitler’s exhortations that he and his party were responsible for reawakening Germany.109

Two days before the election, Chancellor Franz von Papen reached out directly to the United States via a radio address. Sackett believed that the address had at least two purposes: to convince people “that a civil war would probably have broken out in Germany if his government had not taken over the reins of power, and that the Nazis are a harmless or even rather estimable patriotic organization.” Sackett failed to agree with the chancellor’s argument. He contended that the Brüning government had done a good job of preventing a civil war. In fact, he went on to claim, Germany only seemed to drift toward a civil war after the SA ban had been lifted.110

For one of the first times as ambassador, Sackett provided extended analysis of the relationship between the right-wing parties and Communists in Germany. He

109 Hinemon, “Political Meeting of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazis),” 30 July 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12316.

110 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2819, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
asserted that it had long been the practice of right-wing parties to exaggerate the Communist threat. In his opinion, Papen’s suggestion that his government had hindered the growth of communism was a ploy to play on American fears. Sackett stressed that Nazi units were stronger in Germany than the Communist ones. Additionally, he pointed out that the Nazis had been just as destructive as the Communists, but had escaped condemnation because the government had a “benevolent attitude” toward them.111

When the Germans went to the polls, they chose the National Socialists as the largest party, giving them 230 seats out of the 607 total.112 While the Nazis had hoped for more, they finished with over 37 percent of the vote.113 The results represented a dramatic increase from the September 1930 elections, when they had earned a little over 18 percent of the vote. No other party had experienced such a dramatic gain. The Communists and the Center Party had added seats, but the Social Democrats and Nationalists had taken losses.114

Sackett had a good grasp of the results the morning following the election. He notified the State Department immediately that even if the Nazis worked with the Nationalists and additional small parties, they would not be able to create a majority

111 Sackett to State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2819.
112 In fact, the results gave the Nazis the highest total of seats any party had ever achieved. Jerome G. Kerwin, “The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932,” The American Political Science Review 26 (Oct., 1932): 921.
113 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 278.
114 Evans, The Coming of the Third Reich, 293.
If all the parties on the right worked as a coalition, they controlled only 283 votes, which fell short of the 304 seats needed for a majority. The only way for the Nazis to create a working majority would be to join with the Catholic Center Party, which was unlikely.

Despite the NSDAP’s strong showing, American observers believed that the elections might have represented a highpoint of National Socialist strength. Sackett pointed out that despite the Papen government’s favorable treatment of the Nazis, the election had “failed to bring a decisive Nazi victory.” Thus, he concluded, “the crest of the Nazi wave has probably been reached.” Sackett expressed surprise because he thought that the Nazis had positioned themselves to have done better in the election. The consistent showing of about 13 million votes in the last two elections made Sackett believe that the Nazis might have reached their “maximum.”

Military intelligence

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115 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 1 August 1932, 862.00/2810, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

116 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2820, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

117 Patch, Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic, 279.

118 Sackett to State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2820.

119 Sackett to State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2819.

120 Sackett tel to State, 1 August 1932, 862.00/2810.
concurred, asserting that “the phenomenal growth in the strength of this party appears now to have reached its climax.”\(^{121}\)

In analyzing the results, Sackett pointed out that the National Socialists had always claimed that they would destroy the “so-called Marxist Parties.” Yet, in examining the vote distributions, the ambassador concluded that Hitler’s approach had really only decimated the non-Socialist Parties with the exceptions of the Center and the Bavarian People’s Party. The Nazis’ failure to destroy the Communist Party did not end their opposition to it, however. Even before the Reichstag had convened, the Nazis and Nationalists had already begun pressuring the government to ban the Communist Party in Germany. Should the Communists be eliminated from the Reichstag, the Nazis and Nationalists would hold a majority of seats.\(^ {122} \)

The election results as a whole illustrated trends that had been visible on a smaller scale for the past several years. The parties on the ends of the political spectrum, the Nazis and the Communists, had gained in votes, having benefited from decreasing support for the moderate Right parties and the Social Democrats, although the Social Democratic losses were less than expected. The Catholic Center Party had actually gained some votes as well despite heavy campaigning by the Nazis against it.\(^ {123} \)

\(^{121}\) Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Reichstag Election and Recent Political Events,” 11 August 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12337, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\(^{122}\) Sackett to State, 2 August 1932, 862.00/2820; Kerwin, “The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932,” 924.

In the days following the election, the National Socialists were unable to increase their visibility via street demonstrations due to the prohibition Papen had put in place, which forbid public political demonstrations until 10 August. The limitation led the Nazis to alter their usual course of activity and they began engaging in “planned acts of terrorism: arson, shootings, bombings, and assassination attempts.”\footnote{Bessel, “The Potempa Murder,” 243.} Even before any official acknowledgment of the activities, Sackett notified the State Department that the Nazis were committing acts of terrorism throughout Germany. The ambassador linked the acts together because “the same methods were being followed everywhere, and made it clear that a premeditated plan of terrorism was being pursued.” The measures included the use of incendiary bombs and direct attacks against individuals, which Sackett claimed were different than the “spontaneous street brawls” of the past. It seemed to him that the Nazis specifically targeted their opponents on the political left or Jews. The violence had escalated to such a degree that the ambassador did not see how the actions could be curtailed without government action.\footnote{Sackett to State, 9 August 1932, 862.00/2827.} Military intelligence also monitored the events, noting that the acts included “bombings, window smashing and gangster gunning of groups on the streets against enemies of the Nazi Party.” Jacob Wuest emphasized that Jewish businesses and synagogues had also been targeted.\footnote{Wuest, “Reichstag Election and Recent Political Events,” 11 August 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12337.}
According to the ambassador, though, it seemed that the Papen government might continue to make concessions to Hitler rather than acting to quell the violence. Sackett reported, for example, that police had been transferred when they had tried to stand up to Hitler. He contended that the government had been “loath to take concrete steps” despite the fact that most of the country wanted it to act.127 Yet, almost coinciding with Sackett’s reportage, Papen did act, issuing new legislation that would take effect at midnight on 10 August 1932.128

In an addendum to his original dispatch on the acts of terrorism, Sackett noted that the government had altered its course and stepped in “to combat political excesses.”129 Specifically, it had extended the prohibition on political demonstrations through the end of August, increased punishments for violations, including the death penalty for political murders, and created special courts to ensure proper enforcement of the new provisions.130 Sackett remained unconvinced, however, that the Papen government’s actions would improve the situation as the “political terror had assumed formidable proportions.”131

127 Sackett to State, 9 August 1932, 862.00/2827.
129 Sackett to State, 9 August 1932, 862.00/2827.
131 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 9 August 1932, 862.00PR/116, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Rather than view these actions as positive measures taken by the Papen cabinet, Sackett reminded the State Department of previous steps Papen had taken prior to the election. He had taken control in Prussia on 20 July, contending that the state government had allowed Communists to commit unchecked violence, yet the ambassador pointed out that the Nazi-instigated disturbances in Prussia since the election were worse than any that had occurred before. Sackett also prompted State to remember Franz von Papen’s 29 July speech that had lauded the government’s ability to defeat communism and avoid a civil war in Germany. In Sackett’s opinion, the Papen government had only made the situation worse.¹³²

Sackett’s doubts regarding Papen’s intentions and actions soon proved valid. The government had intended to use the measures against the Communists, not the NSDAP, yet ninety minutes after the legislation went into effect, a group of Nazis had murdered a Communist sympathizer in the village of Potempa, near the Polish border.¹³³ While five Nazis were initially convicted and sentenced to death, with Hindenburg’s support the Prussian government stepped in and changed the punishment to life in prison, ruling that since the murder occurred so soon after the mandatory death penalty went into effect, the convicted murderers had not been aware of the consequences.¹³⁴ Sackett found that

¹³² Sackett to State, 9 August 1932, 862.00PR/116.

¹³³ While the victim did have ties to the Communist Party, Richard Bessel convincingly argues that the murder actually occurred because of a personal grudge. Bessel, “The Potempa Murder,” 241-54.

¹³⁴ Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 462.
reasoning rather unconvincing, believing it further illustrated how the Papen government favored the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{135}

Despite speculation that new elections had been held in part to generate more support for the Papen government, Sackett reported that the government would probably continue as a presidential cabinet rather than trying to gain public support of particular parties in the Reichstag.\textsuperscript{136} Contemporary observers agreed. Political scientist Jerome Kerwin believed that while the political parties were not aligning with Papen, he remained in a solid position.\textsuperscript{137} Sackett acknowledged that the NSDAP, which was pushing for more control, represented the wild card.\textsuperscript{138} While the ambassador struggled to figure out what the Nazis would do next and where exactly Hitler stood, Kerwin argued that it had already become clear where Hitler stood, stating “it is questionable if any serious-minded person believes that Hitler is out to advance the interests of anyone other than himself.”\textsuperscript{139}

Even with the turmoil of the election results and the terrorist activity, American observers seemed to be developing a better grasp of the situation in Germany.  If the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 September 1932, 862.00PR/117, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\item Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 6 August 1932, 862.00/2826, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
\item Kerwin also felt that “no one takes seriously the possibility of the return of the monarchy.”  Kerwin, “The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932,” 925.
\item Sackett to State, 6 August 1932, 862.00/2826.
\item Kerwin, “The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932,” 925.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Papen government remained in control, Sackett believed it needed the Reichstag to pass an empowering law, which would give the cabinet the ability to “govern for long periods without convoking the Reichstag.” At the same time he informed the State Department that Papen and Schleicher were involved with ongoing negotiations to bring the Nazis into the cabinet. It was clear to the ambassador that the two German officials were walking a fine line in trying to include Nazis, while trying not to give up the power they held. Yet Hitler and the Nazis kept upping the ante until what Sackett believed was a demand that Hitler be chosen as chancellor as early as August 1932. His supposition proved correct, although Hindenburg rejected both Schleicher’s and Papen’s scenarios for making Hitler chancellor.

Despite Sackett’s general grasp of the situation, the State Department again felt it necessary to send a message to Berlin regarding the content of the embassy’s dispatches. William Castle requested that the embassy “send more frequent and complete telegraphic reports” and stressed that the State Department desired “not so much factual reporting as an analysis of the political situation and the general trend of its

140 Sackett to State, 6 August 1932, 862.00/2826.
141 Sackett to State, 9 August 1932, 862.00PR/116.
142 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 460.
143 Castle sent the earlier message in March 1929. It is discussed at the end of chapter 4. See “Memorandum on Political Despatches,” enclosure to William R. Castle, Under Secretary of State, to DeWitt C. Poole, Counselor of Embassy, Berlin, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2454a, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
probable developments.”144 With the exception of election results, the bulk of Sackett’s reports had been sent via the regular diplomatic pouch. That meant that most information regarding the turmoil and political maneuvering did not reach Washington until two weeks after the events, making it rather difficult for the State Department to formulate timely opinions, especially when the regular dispatches still lacked analysis. The ambassador responded to Castle’s admonishment with a very detailed telegram that covered recent events and Hitler’s integral role in all negotiations for an altered cabinet. Here he reported that Hindenburg had directly denied Hitler the chancellorship. Sackett speculated that the two weeks before the Reichstag convened would be a period of “political tactical maneuvering and bargaining.” He then detailed possible developments.145

In speculating about the future, Sackett stressed that this was all “conjecture,” which had been why he had previously “hesitated to telegraph it,” and in fact much of his speculation regarding “leading possible developments” proved to be incorrect. The ambassador believed that the NSDAP and Center Party might find a way to work together to create a coalition cabinet. If that did not pan out, he thought the two parties would “abstain from voting in the Reichstag” to allow the Papen government to rule as it wished. He also felt the disappointing election results and Hitler’s failure to secure the chancellorship could lead to a split of the Nazi Party into moderate and radical factions,

144 Castle tel to American Embassy, Berlin, 15 August 1932, 862.00/2821A.

145 Frederic M. Sackett tel to Secretary of State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2822, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
with Hitler leading the moderates. Finally, and the possibility he deemed most likely, if a stable government could not be formed, Hindenburg might dissolve the Reichstag.\textsuperscript{146}

Sackett also acknowledged that he had problems figuring out what could happen because of “the attitude of the Nazis who are stable only in their complete intransigence.” Sackett underestimated Hitler and his motivations for refusing lesser positions within the government, believing that Hitler’s demands for the chancellorship or nothing showed “that Hitler personally does not yet feel really capable of assuming the responsibilities of governing.”\textsuperscript{147}

Whatever developed out of the negotiations, Sackett believed a new government would do everything possible to expand on the “veiled dictatorship” Brüning had established. While he still had some confidence in the \textit{Reichswehr}, Sackett feared that its loyalty to the government could no longer be guaranteed as it had “been impregnated to a certain extent with Nazi doctrines.” He did not believe, however, “that Hitler is any more ready for a march on Berlin than he is to take over the parliamentary responsibility of the Government” and concluded that the Papen government would remain in power for at least three months. If the Nazis continued their actions, there would be problems, though he felt that they would eventually “back down.” The situation, he concluded, was “distinctly delicate,” but he had seen no need to send “a telegram of an alarmist character.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Sackett tel to State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2822.

\textsuperscript{147} Sackett tel to State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2822.

\textsuperscript{148} Sackett tel to State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2822.
The same day he transmitted his telegram, Sackett also sent a dispatch through regular channels that essentially contradicted his own thinking. Specifically, he relayed that the Nazis had made it clear they would not be cooperating with the Center Party as Hitler expressed a “dogged intention to rule alone,” a fact that flew in the face of his claims that the parties might find a way to work together. Most believed Hitler would fail as chancellor, Sackett included. As far as he was concerned, Hitler lacked substance and was “one of the biggest show-men since P. T. Barnum.” But the ambassador worried that “the blindness” of the population might just give Hitler the chance.  

Ambassador Sackett’s struggles to understand and predict the course of events were reflected in the military intelligence reports of the time. After Hitler failed to negotiate a place in the cabinet, Jacob Wuest wrote that the situation was “more befogged than ever.” The military attaché believed Hitler’s actions had already led to a loss of supporters and predicted that more would continue to leave after the Nazi leader’s “unreasonable demands for power.”

The situation failed to improve when the Reichstag convened 30 August. With the exception of electing officers, including the Nazi Hermann Göring as president, the legislative body failed to address any other business and adjourned until 12 September. Wuest believed that this action did not bode well for Germany as “the veiled military

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149 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2829, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

150 Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Recent Political Events,” 25 August 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12382, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
dictatorship” seemed “prepared to take bold chances” and the German people were ready to try anything but communism.\textsuperscript{151} At this point, Sackett’s predictions regarding the immediate course of events included dissolution of the Reichstag, new elections, and the Nazis’ entrance into a government with Schleicher as the chancellor.\textsuperscript{152}

Sackett’s predictions were largely on target. Once the Reichstag reconvened, problems developed on the second day. Prior to Papen’s scheduled presentation of his economic program, the Reichstag scheduled a vote of confidence. In an effort to stop the vote, Papen arrived in the body with a Hindenburg-signed declaration dissolving the parliament. Ignoring Papen’s protests, the delegates voted overwhelmingly against the government, 512 to 42. Since the vote occurred after the Papen government had presented the dissolution order, Papen declared the vote invalid and scheduled new elections for 6 November.\textsuperscript{153}

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In a matter of four months, the Brüning government had resigned, the Reichstag had been dissolved twice, and the Papen government had appeared to have no political support. While American observers had accurately reported the events and even

\textsuperscript{151} Jacob W. S. Wuest, “Recent Political Events,” 10 September 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12390, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{152} Sackett to State, 12 September 1932, 862.00PR/117.

\textsuperscript{153} Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 464.
predicted some of them, they strained to explain what had developed in Germany. Hitler
and the National Socialists had managed to stay relevant, but many speculated that the
November elections would lead to a decrease in votes, and thus to a loss of influence.
When Nazi support did drop off dramatically in November and the Papen government
resigned shortly after the elections, U.S. officials watched as negotiations occurred
among Hindenburg, Schleicher, and Hitler.

Ambassador Sackett found it absurd that Germany would be holding Reichstag
elections for the second time in a little over three months. In part, he blamed the National
Socialists. While they had expected to gain control of the cabinet following the July
elections, the Papen government had proven stronger than expected. Sackett doubted that
the new elections would lead to gains for the Nazis, though, because financially most of
the political parties had run low on money and “the people are tired of going constantly to
the polls.”

American observers clearly understood what would happen to Hitler and the
National Socialists. Sackett and Wuest both speculated that the vote totals for the Nazis
would decrease. Military intelligence also had a full understanding of the motivations
and potential actions of the National Socialists. Both Wuest and Herbert Burgman

154 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 19 September 1932, 862.00/2847, Records of the Department
of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives,
Washington, D.C.

155 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 26 September 1932, 862.00PR/118, Records of the Department
of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives,
Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12441, Records of the War Department General and
Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives,
Washington, D.C.
believed that Hitler would continue his attempt to gain control of the government.\footnote{156}
Burgman suggested that Hitler’s problem remained that he attempted to unite Germans in
a single movement, which he believed to be “not possible in a country that was never
united.”\footnote{157} As Hitler hoped to establish a system similar to Mussolini’s in Italy, Burgman
argued that the only person standing in the way remained President Hindenburg.
Burgman believed that Hitler had not overcome Hindenburg’s personal opposition to him
or assuaged the president’s fears of how the Nazis might change the government.\footnote{158}
And while they clearly grasped Hitler’s motivations, they also knew problems would continue.
Wuest concluded that despite the elections, “the existing political deadlock will
remain.”\footnote{159}

The predictions regarding the election results proved to be accurate. Voter turnout
overall dropped more than 3 percent from the July elections.\footnote{160} The NSDAP itself polled
two million votes less than it had three months earlier, which amounted to a more than 4

\footnote{156} In particular, Wuest speculated that Hitler had begun to work towards removing President Hindenburg
from office. Wuest, “Current Political Events,” 1 October 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports,
Germany 1919-1941, Report #12441; Herbert John Burgman, “The Politico-Economic Situation in
Germany: Part II,” 24 October 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report
#12454a, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence
Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\footnote{157} Burgman, “The Politico-Economic Situation in Germany: Part II,” 24 October 1932, U.S. Military
Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12454a.

\footnote{158} Herbert John Burgman, “The Politico-Economic Situation in Germany: Part I,” 11 October 1932, U.S.
Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12454, Records of the War Department
General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National
Archives, Washington, D.C.

\footnote{159} Wuest, “Current Political Events,” 1 October 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-
1941, Report #12441.

\footnote{160} Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 468.
percent decrease, beyond what could be attributed to low voter turnout.\textsuperscript{161} Wuest argued that the results illustrated a “distinct weakening” of the Nazis.\textsuperscript{162} George Gordon concurred, reporting that they had lost votes in all 35 electoral districts and with only 196 seats fell well short of a majority, which required 292. “Even the most ardent Nazi followers,” he contended, “must realize that the much-heralded Third Reich has become a very remote possibility.”\textsuperscript{163}

Following the elections, Papen tried to negotiate parliamentary support for his cabinet to continue. When all efforts failed, he and his cabinet offered their resignation to the president on 17 November. While Hindenburg accepted, he asked them to continue work as he attempted to negotiate a coalition among the parties.\textsuperscript{164} Hindenburg actually offered the chancellorship to Hitler at this point, but required him to have a parliamentary majority supporting him. When Hitler demanded the same powers that Brüning and Papen had had, Hindenburg refused.\textsuperscript{165}

American observers tried to make sense of the situation. After returning to Germany from a vacation in the United States from 4 October to 12 November, Sackett


\textsuperscript{162} Jacob W. S. Wuest, “The Election of November 6th,” 8 November 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12502, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{163} George A. Gordon to Secretary of State, 11 November 1932, 862.00/2872, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{164} Winkler, \textit{Germany: The Long Road West}, 471.

\textsuperscript{165} Patch, \textit{Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic}, 285.
quickly got up to speed. He relayed to the State Department that not only had Hitler demanded the chancellorship, but that he desired the power to rule without Reichstag support. The ambassador contended that Hindenburg feared that Hitler would create a dictatorship and increase political tension in the country. Burgman suggested that most of Germany opposed a Hitler dictatorship.

As the ambassador monitored the situation, he concluded that Germany had “never been in so bad a muddle politically speaking.” Following Hindenburg’s refusal to bow to Hitler’s demands, the only possibilities for a chancellor seemed to be Papen and Schleicher. Sackett believed not only that Schleicher had more support in the Reichstag but that Papen would anger much of the population. Hindenburg appointed Schleicher chancellor on 3 December despite what Sackett believed to be the president’s preference for Papen, whom he viewed as a loyal subordinate. The ambassador felt Schleicher left the president “somewhat uncertain and apprehensive as to where the General’s restless

166 William R. Castle, “Memorandum,” 10 November 1932, 862.00/2870, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

167 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 25 November 1932, 862.00/2876, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

168 Herbert John Burgman, “Side Lights around the Reichstag Elections of Nov. 6, 1932,” 18 November 1932, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports, Germany 1919-1941, Report #12510, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

169 Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 1 December 1932, 862.00/2874, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
energies and abilities may lead him.”¹⁷⁰ There may have been something to Sackett’s speculation, as Papen continued to have influence on Hindenburg and even kept his official residence despite no longer serving as the chancellor.¹⁷¹

The appointment of a new chancellor did little to bring stability to Germany. Schleicher had offered the vice chancellorship to Gregor Strasser, which created a small rift among the Nazis.¹⁷² Sackett reported that Strasser and other Nazis were willing to work with the new chancellor, but that Hitler continued to oppose this step.¹⁷³ He went on to describe the conflict in overblown terms, claiming “what is taking place in the Nazi Party now is a palace revolution rather than an open revolt by the rank and file.” While Strasser opposed Hitler’s all or nothing stance, he did not have the influence or power in the party to alter its course.¹⁷⁴ In fact, on 8 December, Strasser gave up all of his party positions, including his seat in the Reichstag, and took a three-week leave.¹⁷⁵

As the year ended, Germany seemed more chaotic than at any time since the end of World War I. Like the previous cabinet, the Schleicher government had not managed

¹⁷⁰ Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 475; Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 5 December 1932, 862.00/2877, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷¹ Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 475.

¹⁷² Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 476-77.

¹⁷³ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 12 December 1932, 862.00/2879, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷⁴ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 14 December 1932, 862.00/2878, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

to gain much support. And despite electoral losses, Hitler and the National Socialists continued to try to maneuver themselves into control of the government. With Hindenburg opposed to appointing Hitler chancellor, the Nazis attempted a different angle. In January 1933, Adolf Hitler sat down with former chancellor Franz von Papen to improve their relationship and with hopes of influencing President Hindenburg.176

Behind the scenes, and for the most part unknown to American observers, Hitler and the National Socialists were ultimately able to weaken Hindenburg’s resistance to the Nazi leader becoming chancellor of Germany. Sackett, believing that the situation had settled, left for Geneva to prepare for the World Economic Conference; George Gordon, meanwhile set off on vacation.177 During this period, the remaining embassy staff recognized that the National Socialists were attempting to alter the political arrangement, but failed to understand just how much. For instance, Alfred Kliefoth believed that Schleicher continued to try to acquire Nazi support of his cabinet, yet the party proved resistant.178 He also notified the State Department that the Nazis supported a delay in the opening of the Reichstag in order to gain more time to weaken Schleicher’s government.

176 Winkler, Germany: The Long Road West, 477-78.


178 Alfred W. Kliefoth tel to Secretary of State, 21 January 1933, 862.00/2884, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
But other than reporting on the political “confusion,” Kliefoth had no clear grasp of the situation.\(^{179}\)

In response to the political intrigue occurring around him and Hindenburg’s refusal to dissolve the Reichstag, Schleicher submitted his resignation on 28 January. Within forty-eight hours, Hindenburg appointed the Nazi leader as chancellor after being assured that Hitler’s cabinet would include solid conservatives.\(^{180}\) Kliefoth expressed surprise at Schleicher’s downfall, reporting to State that “few people expected that this Machiavelli of post-war Germany, who is reputed to have made and unmade chancellors, would suffer shipwreck so soon and as a result of similar machinations by his former political collaborators.” Understanding now that the meeting between Papen and Hitler in early January had been significant, the chargé noted that the negotiations for a Hitler cabinet had been “conducted with unusual secrecy.”\(^{181}\)

VII

In 1932, American observers had begun to acknowledge that the party left for dead following the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 might be able to join a majority ruling coalition in Germany. As expected, the Nazis made gains in the July Reichstag elections

\(^{179}\) Alfred W. Kliefoth to Secretary of State, 23 January 1933, 862.00/2892, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


\(^{181}\) Alfred W. Kliefoth to Secretary of State, 31 January 1933, 862.00/2899, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
but failed to achieve a majority. While U.S. officials assumed the party would be forced to work in a coalition, Hitler and the National Socialists took an all or nothing approach, demanding that Hitler be appointed chancellor. And to show their strength, the party engaged in acts of terrorism. As long as the largest party in the Reichstag refused to cooperate, the Papen and Schleicher governments had to function as presidential cabinets and rule with emergency decrees.

But U.S. officials seemed unsure how to respond to the political turmoil in Germany. Although they continued to accurately report on the events and provided better analysis than in previous years, they failed to accurately evaluate Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP. Most of the embassy staff doubted that Hitler had the ability to run a government. They mistook his refusal to cooperate with other parties as hesitation, rather than seeing it as calculated determination to fully control the government. And while they noted the Nazi acts of terrorism and the plans to march on Berlin on at least two occasions, they seemed unconcerned about the ramifications of the potential violence that would come with the NSDAP once in power, whether in a coalition or not. Sackett’s reference to Hitler being P.T. Barnum may have been more accurate than the ambassador thought, as Hitler definitely controlled the show after January 1933. U.S. agents had spent more than a decade describing the symptoms of Nazism, but failed to fully diagnose what it meant for both Germany and the United States.
Chapter 8

Continuing Patterns: U.S. Officials Struggle to Evaluate the Nazis

I

Following World War I, the United States and Germany entered a new phase of their relationship. Believing Germany to be the lynchpin of stability in Europe, American policymakers carefully tracked the economic and political situation there. Even though the war had shifted the balance of power in the favor of the United States, the foreign policy approach of the Republican administrations of independent internationalism meant that the United States would not become too directly involved in German affairs.

The lack of direct U.S. involvement was particularly evident in the early 1920s as officials attempted to reestablish a relationship that had been destroyed by the events of World War I. For the first few years of the decade, American policymakers worked to construct a formal relationship via the restoration of fundamental diplomatic relations between the two countries. Beyond the naming of an ambassador and the staffing of consular posts, however, the focus remained on the exertion of indirect influence on Germany as it reentered world affairs.
As American policymakers worked to ensure favorable financial arrangements, the documentation of Germany’s daily domestic struggles by U.S. diplomats and Foreign Service officers throughout the 1920s uncovered a growing extremist political climate. While Ambassador Alanson Houghton focused on taking advantage of the new U.S. position to promote American commercial interests, he also actively encouraged understanding Germany in a broader context. As American officials examined German life, their reports detailed a growing extremist political climate as the financial situation worsened. Despite the State Department’s general lack of concern regarding political developments, Houghton kept a close eye on the situation, particularly in Bavaria. The ambassador ensured that Truman Smith and Robert Murphy actively examined Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. Houghton’s actions resulted in a thorough understanding of the initial phase of the Nazi Party, but the indirect nature of American involvement in Germany meant that little developed out of that knowledge.

As the State Department looked favorably on the reentry of Germany into European affairs via the Dawes Plan and international agreements, American officials hoped this would lead to a revitalized Europe and a new phase in the U.S.-German relationship. When that did not occur, Washington began to realize the significance of understanding Germany’s continuing domestic turmoil, after a delay. During the period when the State Department focused on foreign policy developments, Jacob Gould Schurman had replaced Houghton, and the quality of analysis had suffered. Schurman had quickly developed a positive relationship with the German government, but under his watch, the reports emanating from Germany lacked both thorough coverage and analysis.
This proved to be extremely problematic in developing an understanding of the national political scene and Hitler and the NSDAP during his tenure. And despite its desire to avoid becoming entangled in Germany’s political affairs, even the State Department recognized the necessity of systematically tracking political developments and issued a reminder regarding the content of dispatches. The electoral success of the Nazi Party in the late 1920s and early 1930s did result in a more vigilant State Department. Although Frederic Sackett, the new ambassador, took a direct interest in the political developments, including the NSDAP, the lack of analysis continued.

The post-World War I period presented the United States with an opportunity to not only reestablish relations with Germany but also to also remake that relationship. Republican foreign policy of the 1920s and early 1930s emphasized the primacy of economic affairs and the avoidance of political entanglements. In following this approach in Germany, the State Department did more than just avoid political entanglements. Throughout extended periods, it failed to fully monitor and analyze domestic political developments and in the process did not fully detect the significant weakening of parliamentary government occurring throughout the period. Even though Washington requested more coverage and analysis from its agents in Germany as the political situation deteriorated, it came too late. During the period from 1920 to 1933, the United States and Germany managed to reestablish formal cordial relations, but Republican desires for an enhanced, American-led U.S.-German relationship hinged on the establishment of a stable Germany, which did not occur.
This dissertation illustrates that the State Department, its diplomats, and the Foreign Service were central to the American understanding of Hitler and the National Socialists, but it also shows that the State Department’s relationship with its diplomats and Foreign Service officers could be strained at times. In the first few years of the 1920s, diplomats based in Germany proved to have a fuller grasp on the German political situation than Washington. Alanson Houghton, Robert Murphy, and Truman Smith had identified the NSDAP as a radical nationalist movement with the potential to gain adherents in turbulent Bavaria, particularly due to the oratorical abilities of Hitler. Their dispatches detailed the main tenets of Nazism and accurately evaluated where the party fit in the German political spectrum. The failed Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923 changed their coverage.

Following the unsuccessful coup, U.S. observers in Germany then failed to assess accurately the potential and growing threat of Hitler and the National Socialists. The failed putsch seemed to color the American officials’ perceptions, and their coverage proved to be marked by misconceptions, some confusion, and, at times, complete disregard for the success of Hitler and his party over the course of the decade. The disastrous rebellion led numerous officials to question whether Hitler had the qualifications to be a party leader, let alone a prominent politician. They felt he did not have the pedigree necessary of a statesman.

While the State Department observed this from a distance, it had made sure the American ambassadors to Germany fit a particular mold, which affected their analysis of
Adolf Hitler. All three ambassadors held particular views of what constituted a proper politician as they had all been deeply involved with Republican Party politics. Alanson Houghton resigned from his second term in the U.S. House of Representatives to take his post as ambassador.¹ While he never served in political office, Jacob Gould Schurman worked for numerous Republican campaigns at the state and national level. Schurman’s dedication during the presidential campaign of William Howard Taft led to his first diplomatic post as ambassador to Greece in 1912.² And Frederic Sackett cut short his first term in the U.S. Senate in order to accept his appointment to Germany.³ Men so involved in politics struggled to deal with a charismatic leader so unlike American politicians as Sackett’s reference to Hitler as P. T. Barnum suggests.⁴

The choice of ambassadors also clearly reflected the American approach during the 1920s. All three men embodied the conservative Republicanism followed by the State Department, which stressed a foreign policy of independent internationalism emphasizing economic interests. Both Houghton and Sackett had been selected for the post because of their past experiences in business and finance. Schurman had vigorously supported the party and the “virtues of big business” while serving as the president of

⁴ Frederic M. Sackett to Secretary of State, 17 August 1932, 862.00/2829, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Cornell University prior to his appointment. This stress on stabilizing Germany’s economic foundation caused political developments to be a secondary concern.

After Houghton’s departure, American reports generally provided descriptive coverage of political events, but rarely presented a thorough analysis of Hitler and the NSDAP after the putsch. Once the party had been reorganized in the mid-1920s and began finding some success throughout Germany, the lack of analysis eventually became a glaring problem, spurring Under Secretary of State William R. Castle to send at least two requests to the embassy for better coverage. After each, a short burst of analysis appeared in the dispatches, but that, too, tapered off, suggesting that U.S. agents were struggling with the task.

American efforts seemed to be constrained by the nature of the constant change of officials based in Germany. Many U.S. agents only served for three or four years before moving on to new positions. In fact, Alanson Houghton confronted the State Department over the “constant shuffling” of personnel, believing it hindered his ability to fulfill his ambassadorial duties. For many, their stay represented an early learning

5 Moser, Jacob Gould Schurman, 25.

6 “Memorandum on Political Despatches,” enclosure to William R. Castle, Under Secretary of State, to DeWitt C. Poole, Counselor of Embassy, Berlin, 6 March 1929, 862.00/2454a, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Germany, 1910-1929, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; William R. Castle tel to American Embassy, Berlin, 15 August 1932, 862.00/2821A, Records of the Department of State Central Files, Germany: Internal Affairs, 1930-1941, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


8 Matthews, Alanson B. Houghton, 56-57.
experience in their diplomatic career. Robert Murphy had only had one foreign assignment prior to his four-year posting in Munich and once there felt that the U.S. government “did not think it mattered much who represented it in Munich.”\(^9\) His replacement, Charles Curtis, would only serve three years in Munich.

Numerous other factors also hindered the ability of American observers. Training may have been an issue for some. Murphy claimed that the British consul general in Munich taught him “how to write effective political reports, something which my own government never taught me.”\(^10\) Indeed, the State Department seemed relatively uninvolved during Murphy’s service, perhaps due to the low regard many policymakers held for consular officials who were responsible for covering the daily affairs of foreign governments.\(^11\) In fact, Congress passed the Rogers Act in 1924 to reorganize “the consular and diplomatic services into a unified Foreign Service.”\(^12\) U.S. diplomats also clashed over whether they should have direct contact with the Nazis. George S. Messersmith and John Wiley encouraged such contact in the 1930s, something George Gordon, the counselor of the embassy, considered a violation of protocol.\(^13\) Additionally, the Great Depression affected the pay of Foreign Service officers by the 1930s. Many

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10 Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, 19.

11 It should be noted that Ambassador Houghton had long supported the reorganization and had actively worked with consular officials during his time in Germany. Matthews, *Alanson B. Houghton*, 56.


consular officials who were already struggling faced both pay cuts and the cancellation of paid leaves.  

The American understanding of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis developed in large part due to the efforts of the State Department, its diplomats, and the Foreign Service. But their efforts were constrained by a number of factors. The results of World War I had thrust the United States into a new and more powerful international role in the 1920s. Not only did the State Department take on new prominence, but it also had to bring the Foreign Service into a more modern form. But its policy of economic primacy and aversion to political entanglements led to a lack of focus on the political extremism developing in Germany.

III

This dissertation begins to fill the gap in historical scholarship that exists in understanding American perceptions of the Nazi enemy. Current studies either commence their coverage in 1933 when Adolf Hitler became chancellor or even later, in 1939 with the beginning of World War II. While Hitler and the National Socialists were not declared enemies of the United States during the period from 1920 to 1933, understanding how American policymakers formed their views provides a fuller context to later developments.

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14 Stiller, George S. Messersmith, 26-27.
This study illustrates that in the early 1920s U.S. agents had a clear grasp of Hitler’s aims and felt that the NSDAP could possibly grow as German discontent continued unabated. They quickly shifted course after the failure of the Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923. Prior to the coup, Americans in Germany felt that Hitler had some strengths—his oratorical skills, in particular—but could not be marked as a potentially strong leader as he had not been tested. U.S. diplomats interpreted the failed putsch as evidence that Hitler and the Nazis would be unable to succeed in Germany. Even as the party reorganized and found electoral success, they doubted that the leader and his party would ever become a factor in the government. The struggle of U.S. policymakers to evaluate Hitler and the Nazis from 1920 to 1933 continued even after Hitler became chancellor. Thus, understanding American perceptions of National Socialism from 1920 to 1933 informs the overall U.S. response to the Nazis.
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