Losing Faith in Civilization:
The German Occupation of Congress Poland and the Crisis of Multinational Imperialism

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that the experience of occupying Congress Poland in WWI fundamentally transformed how German imperialists thought about ruling ethnically diverse space. Germany faced a strategic paradox in 1914. German imperialists believed that seizing control of part or all of Congress Poland was necessary to reinforce the German Empire's long vulnerable frontier with Russia. Yet planners worried that annexing any new Polish territories would provoke sustained resistance from Polish nationalists, which could destabilize German control in the region or even endanger the German Empire. German imperialists proposed two very different models for managing the resident Polish population. Proponents of the first model rigidly equated national identity and political loyalty. They recommended securing lasting control over annexations in Congress Poland through aggressive policies of homogenization. Nationalist groups like the Pan-German League infamously proposed establishing German rule by systematically repressing Polish culture, colonizing the region with ethnic German settlers, or even expelling Polish residents further eastward.

However, German political culture in 1914 also supported a competing multinational vision of ethnic management and imperial organization. Multinational imperial projects in Poland were promoted by intellectuals and politicians across the German political spectrum, but garnered particularly strong support from left liberals, moderate conservatives, and Roman Catholics. Multinationalists rejected the conceit that the Polish nation was irreconcilably hostile to German interests and argued that Polish national identity could be compatible with loyalty to the German Empire. Indeed, they held that institutional protections for cultural diversity actually reinforced imperial solidarity. They believed that Germany and Poland had common strategic interests, and that Berlin could manipulate Polish national sentiment with relative ease. Multinationalists proposed a grand compromise with Polish nationalists, wherein Germany would grant Poland political autonomy in exchange for loyalty to the German Empire. They believed that Berlin would best achieve its strategic objectives by creating an autonomous Kingdom of Poland in permanent military and political union with the German Empire. Berlin would secure its eastern frontier by controlling Poland's foreign policy and wartime military command, but otherwise refrain from interfering in Polish domestic affairs. From 1914 to 1916, the military and civilian leadership of the German Empire carefully weighed the benefits and risks of these competing imperial models, and determined that Germany's strategic interests lay in the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty. On 5 November 1916, the German Empire established the Kingdom of Poland in pursuit of this aim.

However, I argue that Germany's experiences in occupying Congress Poland after 1916 ultimately discredited multinational imperialism. Following the declaration of the Polish state, a series of political crises in occupied Poland undermined multinationalists' faith that Poles would loyally collaborate with the German Empire. Dramatic demonstrations organized by Polish

nationalists suggested that Polish opposition to German imperial leadership was more robust than expected. Conversely, the Polish intellectual and political elites that multinationalists had expected to rely upon, seemed either unwilling or unable to persuade their countrymen to accept German leadership. Critics of multinational imperialism argued that these crises proved that creating a Kingdom of Poland would only equip treacherous Poles with a political and military apparatus to use against Germany. Similarly, German military and political elites began to doubt that an autonomous Polish state would bolster German security, and instead began to regard Poland as a potential strategic threat. Though Germany continued to build a Kingdom of Poland until the end of the war, Berlin quietly adjusted its policies to balance and contain the Polish state, and fortify the German Empire against a possible betrayal by Warsaw. The collapse of the occupation ultimately discredited multinational strategies of ethnic management for both policy-makers in Berlin and the wider German public. The experiences of occupying Congress Poland in WWI ultimately convinced German imperialists that Polish national identity was incompatible with loyalty to the German Empire, and that national heterogeneity threatened imperial stability. When Germans later pondered how to project influence and manage ethnically diverse space, the occupation was cited as proof that Poles and other non-German populations represented an intrinsic threat to imperial security.

This dissertation draws upon two main bodies of sources. First, it examines a broad array of publications to examine wartime debates over imperial policy among intellectuals, politicians, and members of the German public. Second, extensive use has been made of archival records detailing the development of the German government's plans for Congress Poland during the war, especially within the Chancellery, Imperial Office of the Interior, Foreign Office, and administration of German occupied-Poland. The first four chapters closely examine multinationalist proposals for establishing German imperial influence over Congress Poland in WWI. They examine the inspirations, assumptions, and plans of German multinationalists and how these differed from alternative models of imperial management. Collectively, these chapters argue that multinational imperialism was deeply rooted in Germany's own national political culture, and thus found support among a broad and influential segment of the German political public. Chapter 5 examines how the military and civilian leadership of the German Empire crafted policy for achieving German objectives in Congress Poland from 1914-1916. It finds that both commanders in the German army and civilian leaders in the Chancellery, Foreign Office, and Imperial Office of the interior were sympathetic to the arguments of multinational imperialism. By the spring of 1916, a broad consensus in favor of multinational imperialism prevailed among Germany's military and civilian leadership. Chapter 6 argues that political frictions in occupied-Poland after 1916 severely eroded the confidence of German intellectuals, military commanders, and civilian officials in the potential reliability of a Polish state under German suzerainty. The study concludes by briefly examining how Germans interpreted multinational imperial policy after WWI, and what conclusions they drew from Berlin's failed attempt to establish an autonomous Polish state in permanent military and political union with the German Empire.

For Kaye,

This work would not have been possible without her.

Table of Contents

	Introduction	1
1	Germany's Public Debate over Managing Polish Space in WWI	26
2	Renouncing Colonialism for the Civilized East	76
3	Russian Barbarism and Austrian Salvation	104
4	Federalism as a German Model of Imperial Expansion	129
5	The German-Polish Union: German Policy-Makers and Multinational Imperialism, 1914-1916	148
6	The Crisis of Multinational Imperialism	247
	Conclusion	375
	Bibliography	407

Introduction

German Army commanders on the Eastern Front had good reasons to be optimistic in September 1917. Two years before, the Gorlice-Tarnów offensive had smashed Russian positions and driven Tsarist forces eastward. German troops had since endured the entrance of Romania into the war, and successfully repulsed Brusilov's 1916 offensive, all while propping up the faltering armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In July, Alexander Kerensky had launched the first and only major offensive for the newly minted Russian provisional government. It failed spectacularly. Suffering heavy losses, entire Russian units had melted away in desertion or mutiny. After years of hard fighting, the German army had achieved a dominant military position in the former Russian Empire, and victory seemed within grasp.

But Hans Hartwig von Beseler, the Governor General of German-occupied Congress Poland, was morose. On 30 September he wrote to his wife Clara:

> … it would be much easier, to gain victories among the cheers of the Fatherland, than to prosecute an immeasurably difficult political mission according to one's best conscience and abilities, regardless of all attacks and hostilities. I must reflect daily on Dürer's Knight, Death, and Devil. Our great (i.e. Polish) policy still hangs in the balance. The decisive Polish men, whose selection was also only the result of a compromise, are difficult to convince of what is necessary… The whole struggle is again very difficult, but one must remain firm.[1]

Beseler referred to "The Knight", an engraving from Albrecht Dürer's 16th century *Meisterstiche* series. The composition depicts an armored rider shadowed by mounted Death, who mocks the knight with his own mortality. The knight is also stalked by the devil, a monstrous and corrupted form who tempts him to violence. As his administration of German-occupied Congress Poland began its third year, Beseler feared that his work was balanced on a knife's edge. Beseler saw himself as the knight. His crusade was to secure lasting control over this strategically valuable region. He firmly believed that Germany could achieve its objectives by convincing the native Polish population to accept a particular model of German imperial rule as legitimate. Beseler too was haunted by failure, a spectral death whose smile was both frightening and inviting. He too was stalked by the devil, threatened by the possibility that the failure or corruption of his crusade would invite an alternative model of empire, perhaps one far more monstrous than his own.

This dissertation is about how Germans conceived of managing ethnically diverse space, and why their ideas about ethnic management changed dramatically in the early 20th century. At its core, it is about how German intellectuals, publicists, politicians, military commanders, and civilian leaders envisioned the future structure of their empire in Europe, who should share the obligations and rights of membership, and what their relationship to the state should be. It focuses on how Germans intended to address the multiple and sometimes competing political claims associated with ethnic and national identities, and how they planned to reconcile such claims with the maintenance of state authority and imperial solidity.

Historians have frequently suggested that Germans predominantly opposed ethnic diversity and favored the homogenization of the German Empire by the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Studies routinely portray pre-war German political culture as fostering the belief that national homogeneity was indispensible for imperial unity, and that only this robust unity could guarantee Germany's lasting security.[2] This historiography has long buttressed a narrative of pathological continuity in German attitudes towards cultural diversity and imperial organization, one which suggests that German programs of imperial expansion in WWI, especially those in Poland in Eastern Europe, closely prefigured the later brutality of Nazi imperialism.

This dissertation argues that the experience of occupying Congress Poland in WWI

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[1] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler," September 30, 1917, 129, N30/55, BArch.

[2] Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3–6.

fundamentally transformed how Germans thought about governing ethnically diverse space. German political culture in 1914 supported a vision of empire which considered cultural and even national diversity compatible with imperial strength and integrity. During the war, influential thinkers and policy-makers firmly believed that Germany would most effectively secure its strategic objectives in Congress Poland by negotiating a permanent settlement with Polish nationalists. Specifically they proposed establishing an autonomous Kingdom of Poland within a larger German imperial structure. These German imperialists confidently argued that, so long as Poles were guaranteed political and cultural self-governance, they would accept German leadership as a legitimate and necessary safeguard of their own autonomy. From 1914-1916, the leaders of the German imperial government and military increasingly agreed that founding an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty represented the most efficient method for fortifying the security of the German Empire and avoiding Polish resistance. In 1916, Berlin therefore established a Kingdom of Poland with the intention of binding it in permanent military and political union with the German Empire. After 1916, however, a series of political crises in occupied-Poland gradually convinced German imperialists that Poles could not be relied upon to defend and collaborate with the German Empire. Many German imperialists interpreted dramatic acts of Polish protest as proof that Polish nationalism could not be easily manipulated to serve German ends. Some even concluded that Poles were inherently hostile to German interests. German intellectuals and policy-makers lost confidence that an autonomous Polish state would function as a strategic asset for the German Empire and many instead came to regard the Kingdom of Poland as a dire threat to German security. The collapse of the German occupation in 1918 destroyed the remaining credibility of this imperial model. In doing so, it removed one of the basic paradigms of ethnic management available to German imperialists, one which had functioned during the war as an attractive alternative to models of expansion premised on cultural homogenization and ethnic cleansing. To German imperialists, ethnic homogenization thereafter seemed the only rational and empirically credible option for securing reliable control over foreign space.

At the outset of WWI, German imperialists could draw upon two credible models of ethnic management that were firmly rooted in German political culture: nationalizing and multinational imperialism. Both paradigms assumed that national identity was practically immutable, and that policies of linguistic Germanization would fail to assimilate any sizeable populations. Proponents of nationalizing imperialism strongly equated national identity with political loyalty. They doubted that individuals could be truly loyal to the German Empire if they did not speak the German language or consider themselves culturally German. They worried that national minorities would pursue political agendas at odds with the interests of Berlin and inevitably resist German rule. They therefore sought to reinforce the unity and security of the German Empire through its cultural, national, or even 'racial' homogenization. Some nationalizing imperialists suggested stripping minorities of their civil rights and legal protections in order to deny them political influence and facilitate Germanization. Others called upon Berlin to support the colonization of culturally heterogeneous territories. By flooding these regions with ethnic German settlers, they hoped to engineer a more politically reliable population. More radical voices even called for the government to purge heterogeneous space of its non-German residents through population-transfers or outright expulsions.

But this paradigm of ethnic management faced strong competition from *multinational* imperialism in the early years of WWI. Multinational imperialists recognized that national identity generated certain strong political claims, especially for access to vernacular education. But they did not believe that national identity necessarily defined political loyalty. Multinational imperialists espoused a far more statist vision of political loyalty. Non-Germans, they insisted, would loyally serve the German Empire if they believed that the empire also defended and advanced their own interests. Indeed, they argued that institutional protections of cultural diversity and national autonomy would secure Berlin's lasting control over imperial space far more effectively, and at lower cost, than the coercion and violence of homogenization. Drawing upon Germany's own national traditions of cultural heterogeneity and federalism, multinational imperialists envisioned an expanded empire in which federalist structures would guarantee the

cultural rights and political autonomy of various member nations, and would bind them together in pursuit of common strategic objectives, collective security, and economic prosperity.

Multinational imperialism enjoyed broad support in Germany in the early years of the war. Left liberal, Roman Catholic, and moderate conservative intellectuals and politicians offered particularly vocal support for this model of expansion. In the Reichstag the leadership of both the Catholic Center Party and the left liberal Progressive People's Party likewise favored multinational imperialism, and leant this paradigm considerable political weight. Multinational imperialism also attracted influential civilian officials in the imperial government and commanders in the German army.[3]

Throughout WWI, publicists, intellectuals, military commanders, and civilian leaders grappled with which of these two imperial paradigms would best secure Germany's strategic interests in Congress Poland.[4] German imperialists considered control of this region indispensible for the German Empire's future security. Congress Poland jutted westward from the Russian Empire, a salient protrusion of hostile territory wedged between East Prussia and Austrian Galicia. From the western borders of Congress Poland, well-placed Russian artillery could shell some of Germany's most vital industrial facilities in the first hours of a war. Berlin lay within striking distance of the Russian border. Planners therefore consistently prioritized seizing part or all of Congress Poland as one of Germany's most important objectives in the war. But German imperialists fretted over how to establish Berlin's stable control over the region's resident Polish population. Most observers recognized Polish nationalism as a powerful force that Germany could not afford to ignore. They believed that Polish-speakers had already developed a strong sense of national culture, history, and identity, and would therefore resist linguistic Germanization. German planners worried that attempting to annex part or all of Congress Poland would provoke lasting nationalist unrest, and that Polish agitators would resist, subvert, or even revolt against German rule. Indeed, they feared that Polish leaders might conspire with Germany's rivals, coordinating with foreign sponsors to overthrow German rule and seize the region for themselves. These concerns were heightened by the very real possibility that instability could spread westward into Prussia, where a large Polish-speaking minority already resided. At the very least, nationalist unrest in Congress Poland would undermine any strategic gains Berlin hoped to make in the region. At worst, it could threaten the very integrity of the German Empire.

In WWI German imperialists fiercely debated how to establish durable strategic control over Congress Poland. At stake was how Germans imagined the future composition of the German Empire and whether its stability lay in homogenization or the explicit protection of diversity. By 1916, proponents of multinational imperialism successfully convinced broad segments of the public and much of the imperial leadership that their model of ethnic

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[3] I have chosen the term "multinational imperialism" for several reasons. Some historians have referred to German efforts to pursue 'indirect' rule in Eastern Europe. This term is vague, and could imply anything from favorable trade agreements to facile puppet governments under Berlin's rigid control. I also eschewed the term 'cultural imperialism' because the vision of imperial organization espoused by the German planners in question explicitly sought to avoid Germany's intervention in the cultural development or domestic affairs of affected nations. "Liberal" imperialism also struck me as inappropriate. Many proponents of nationalizing imperialism were self-identified liberals, and their commitment to homogenization was often closely related to their liberal assumptions. Conversely, many multinational imperialists were not liberal, and some opposed liberalism as a political ideology. Finally 'multinational imperialism' is an appropriate term because proponents essentially intended to reorganize Germany into a multinational empire. Their plans entailed the recognition of permanent national minorities within the bounds of the German Empire, and the political institutionalization of nations. One could take issue with the "multi" component of multinational imperialism, as the proposals discussed below generally focused on Germany's relationship with Congress Poland. However, many multinational imperialists did envision using the model to establish German hegemony beyond just Poland. Germans generally understood it as a broad model of imperial organization, one which was appropriate for situations in which the German Empire sought to integrate territory with a large, non-German, and politically organized population.

[4] "Congress Poland" refers to those territories established as the Kingdom of Poland in personal union with the Russian Tsar by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The Russian government would reorganize the territory several times. By 1914, the Russian Empire governed Congress Poland as the "Vistula Land", itself comprised of 11 distinct governorates.

management represented the most plausible and advantageous means of achieving Germany's strategic objectives in Congress Poland. Multinationalist publicists and intellectuals confidently predicted that Poles would willingly cooperate with the German Empire in pursuit of mutual security, so long as Berlin offered them robust cultural and political autonomy. After months of debate, Germany's military and political leadership agreed, and began efforts to establish a multinationalist German-Polish union.[·] Following the logic of multinationalist intellectuals, the German government intended to strike a grand bargain with the Polish nation, trading national autonomy for fidelity to the German Empire. They planned to establish an autonomous kingdom from the territory of Congress Poland. Seated in Warsaw, the King of Poland would preside over a Polish administration, government, and police force. Poland would enjoy complete control over its own cultural institutions and domestic affairs, and a Polish army would ensure the autonomy of the state. In exchange, Berlin expected that Poland would accept a permanent and quasi-federal union with the German Empire, submitting to Berlin's control of a common foreign policy and accepting the Kaiser's joint command of German and Polish military forces in the event of war. German planners felt confident that Poles would accept multinational union as mutually advantageous. Germany would obtain a shorter and far more defensible border with the Russian empire, and the Polish army would augment Berlin's military strength. In return, an autonomous Polish state would enjoy the military protection of the German Empire. The common threat of Russian expansionism, they believed, would bind Germany and Poland together in a permanent security union. German planners rejected competing nationalizing models of imperial expansion for Poland largely because they believed multinational imperialism would achieve greater strategic gains at a lower political, material, and ethical cost. In effect, as long as multinational imperialism offered a credible alternative, it functioned as a high barrier to the adoption of nationalizing ethnic management.[·] In November 1916, the German Empire established the Kingdom of Poland with the intention of integrating it into a permanent German-Polish union.

Over the following two years, however, German experiences in occupying Congress Poland deeply undermined the credibility of multinational imperialism, and leant apparent vindication to the arguments of nationalizing imperialists. German observers were disappointed by Poles' apparent unwillingness to support the war effort against Russia. Frequent clashes between Polish civilians and occupation authorities reinforced the perception of popular hostility to the German Empire. Sympathetic Polish elites, upon whom imperial planners had hoped to rely, seemed either unwilling or unable to cultivate widespread popular support for cooperation or multinational union with Germany. Conversely, dramatic demonstrations organized by advocates of Polish independence increasingly convinced German observers that both the political elite and broad masses of the Polish nation would resist German leadership and instead pursue goals which were irreconcilable with German interests. Germans came to understand Polish national identity as more directly related to political loyalty, and more inherently hostile to the German Empire. Publicists, intellectuals, and the military and civilian leadership of the German Empire all gradually lost confidence that a Polish state could be relied upon to defend and serve a German-Polish union. They increasingly feared that Polish nationalists would subvert or betray the Germany at their first convenience. Rather than earning the gratitude and fidelity of the Polish nation, many Germans came to believe that the creation of a Polish state had only organized and equipped Poles for more effective resistance against the German Empire. Public and official support for multinationalist policy declined considerably in the final years of the war, and German imperialists sought more reliable methods for achieving their objectives in

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[·] "German-Polish union" is my term of art. German publicists and imperial planners variously described the project as the "German solution" to the Polish question, "Beseler policy", German "suzerainty" over a Polish state, or a German-Polish "settlement" [*Ausgleich*]. Only rarely did they use the term *Anschluss* or *anschliessen*. This could be translated as "connection" or "attachment", but in context, "union" would generally be a more appropriate translation. I have chosen to describe the proposed arrangement as a "German-Polish union" because this term accurately conveys Berlin's intention to create and preserve a Polish state in permanent military and political union with the German Empire.

[·] I thank Aviel Roshwald for discussing my work and for suggesting the phrase "high barrier".

Congress Poland. Policy-makers and writers considered annexing larger slices of Polish territory. They contemplated securing these gains with more coercive administrative structures, or through more aggressive policies of national homogenization. By the end of the war, nationalizing imperialists argued that the experiences of the occupation had validated their rigid equation of national identity and political loyalty. This interpretation of the occupation would have a lasting impact on German understandings of imperial organization and ethnic management.

In 1914, German political culture supported a model of imperial organization which understood the institutional protection of cultural diversity as compatible with, and even conducive to, the integrity and strength of the German Empire. From 1914-1916 influential segments of Germany's political and intellectual elite, including major political parties, the civilian leadership of the German Empire, and the upper echelons of the army, determined that this multinationalist imperialism offered better prospects for establishing Berlin's lasting control over Congress Poland than nationalizing alternatives. After 1916, however, repeated political frustrations and crises in Congress Poland gradually undermined the credibility of multinational imperialism, convincing Germans that Poles could not be relied upon to collaborate with the German Empire and that homogenization represented the only viable path to imperial stability.

The Great War and Occupation Policy in German History

Historians have often interpreted German war aims in WWI, especially in Eastern Europe, as a prelude to the more aggressive and violent ambitions of Nazi Germany. Fritz Fischer and his student Imanuel Geiss pioneered this argument, and their work continues to influence present historiography. Both historians portrayed Berlin as committed, more or less throughout the war, to an aggressive imperial program based on the Germanization of Polish space. In his landmark work on WWI, Fischer charged the German Empire with primary responsibility for the war, arguing that Germany had entered the war in pursuit of an ambitious program of territorial expansionism. Fischer focused his research on the territorial scope of German plans, and was less interested in how Germans planned to organize and manage various populations. He therefore routinely conflated vastly different proposals for imperial organization in part because they shared the objective of extending German influence, and in part because he did not believe Berlin genuinely intended to keep any promises of autonomy.[4] For Fischer, almost any suggestion of annexations or "border-rectifications" along the Polish border automatically entailed Berlin's intention to secure a large border-strip of territory through ethnic cleansing and colonization.[5] Believing that German planners never really intended to follow-through on their promises of autonomy for Poland, Fischer did not investigate how changing perceptions of occupied population impacted the credibility of various models of ethnic management.[6]

Imanuel Geiss focused narrowly on German ambitions in Poland, arguing that it was "the firm will of the German imperial leadership from December 1914 until August 1918, to annex Polish territory along Germany's Eastern border and to Germanize this to the greatest extent possible", mainly through, he argued, colonization and ethnic cleansing.[7] For Geiss, proposals for an alternative program of imperial influence in Poland represented a "negligible" faction of public and official opinion and he believed that Germans never really regarded the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland as a serious priority.[8] The German government, he insisted, willingly sabotaged its halting efforts to establish a friendly Polish state in pursuit of its actual objective, the attainment of a large and ethnically German strip of annexations.[9] Given his firm conviction that Berlin's aims in Poland were essentially static throughout the war, Geiss also declined to seriously investigate how German perceptions of Polish nationalism evolved, and how these changing perceptions affected German attitudes towards competing models of ethnic

[4] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 160.
[5] Ibid., 244.
[6] Ibid., 240.
[7] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 5, 148.
[8] Ibid., 33, 70.
[9] Ibid., 28.

management and imperial organization. Indeed, Geiss often neglected to examine how German imperialists actually intended to manage occupied Polish populations, on several occasions simply assuming that most proponents of annexation automatically supported colonization and ethnic cleansing.[10] In some instances, he even asserted that certain thinkers were secretly committed to a nationalized border-strip, even when they publicly opposed such plans.[11] However Geiss's work, and his judgment that a nationalized border-strip represented Germany's primary war aim in Poland throughout the war, remains foundational for the historiography of German war aims in WWI.

Although subsequent research has grappled more explicitly with how Germans approached ethnic management, it has often ratified Fischer's and Geiss's conclusion that German imperialists already favored nationalizing strategies of ethnic management in 1914. Recent research has generally argued that German imperial methods radicalized in WWI, but were committed to Germanization from the beginning of the war. Vejas Liulevicius has argued that the German Empire entered the war with the intention of securing annexed territory through the subjugation and gradual Germanization of native populations, but that native resistance to German rule convinced occupation officials to entertain more coercive and violent methods to nationalize conquered space. His path breaking study of *Oberbefehlshaber Ost* (Ober Ost), the German army's WWI occupation regime in Russia's Baltic coast and its hinterland, identified a particular *Ostfront* "experience", which left a lasting impact on Germany's military and political culture. Military authorities generally assumed that Germany would eventually annex the occupied territories of Ober Ost. They therefore initially worked to 'civilize' resident populations with the aim of gradually integrating them into German culture.[12] Ober Ost's policies sought to establish a ruling class of ethnic German administrators who would firmly control the continued development of native cultures and gradually guide them towards Germanization.[13] When native resistance to the economic pillage, violent abuses, and arrogant cultural interventions of the occupation dashed the army's vaunting ambitions, Liulevicius argues that Germans began to think of Eastern European populations as inherently primitive and incapable of civilization. What Germans initially approached as a set of "lands and peoples" to be directed, cultivated, civilized, and Germanized, they increasingly viewed as a set of "races and spaces" to be violently ruled.[14] Observer and occupation officials increasingly dreamed of purging these territories of their intractable natives and clearing the space for more appropriate and 'civilized' German settlers.[15] Liulevicius therefore sees a shift in Imperial Germany's approach to ethnic management over the course of the war, from something resembling integral nationalism, to a more genocidal model of imperial expansion.

Liulevicius's work fits into a growing body of literature portraying WWI as a moment of radicalization for European imperialism. This work identifies the Great War as a catalyst which produced and propagated new "theories and methods" by which governments sought to finally achieve national homogeneity, including ethnic cleansing and genocide.[16] Scholars have thus argued that European empires and states had already widely begun to pursue policies of ethnic homogenization in the late 19th century, in response to local resistance to the centralization and rationalization of state authority. These states showed a growing willingness to employ violence

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[10] Ibid., 32, 46, 71.
[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7–8; Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, "German Military Occupation and Culture on the Eastern Front in World War I," in *The Germans and the East*, ed. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 201.
[13] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 40, 58.
[14] Ibid., 107.
[15] Ibid., 9.
[16] Jörn Leonhard, "Imperial Projections and Piecemeal Realities: Multiethic Empires and the Experience of Failure in the Nineteenth Century," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, ed. Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 45–46; Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer, "Introduction," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 6.

in pursuit of ethnic homogenization over the course of the "long" First World War.[17] The series of European conflicts from the First Balkan War in 1912 through the Treaty of Lausanne in 1922, these scholars argue, saw the codification of the homogenized nation-state as a norm of international relations, the increasing willingness of states to use violence to achieve it, and the instantiation of "ethnic cleansing as a means of international politics" in the form of legally sanctioned population transfers.[18] German plans for a homogenized border-strip in Poland are thus understood as part of a European radicalization of nationalizing ethnic management.[19]

Several bodies of literature have reinforced this narrative of radicalization. Most importantly, historians have often argued that Prussian experiences in governing its own Polish-speaking minority had already convinced most Germans by 1914 that nationalization was a strategic necessity for the effective control of territory. Scholars like William Hagen have suggested that the Prussian government fell into a feedback loop, wherein initial Germanization efforts actually stiffened nationalist resistance from Poles. The failure of Germanization created a feeling of "helplessness" in Berlin, as authorities worried about the possibility of a Polish revolt or challenge to Prussian rule, but simultaneously felt unable to assimilate the Polish-speaking minority.[20] German nationalists and Prussian authorities responded to failure by embracing more radical measures to uproot Polish Prussians and Germanize the land.[21] What began with linguistic Germanization eventually led to laws enabling the Prussian state to expropriate and redistribute Polish property, and calls for the expulsion of Polish Prussian citizens.[22] This package of expropriations and expulsions has been generally understood as Berlin's template for planning its objectives in Congress Poland after the outbreak of war in 1914. With peacetime experience having already radicalized the Prussian bureaucracy's approach to ethnic management, the German government is portrayed as quickly adopting a nationalizing imperial model in wartime, and broadly supporting plans for the annexation of a large border-strip in Poland and the purgation of much or all of its Polish-speaking population.[23]

Studies on the German army's culture and influence on imperial policy-making have generally reinforced this conclusion. Isabel Hull has argued that a pathological institutional culture in the German army favored the liberal application of violence to achieve strategic objectives.[24] In WWI, Hull argues, this military culture manifested in the army's obsession with

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[17] Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Mark Biondich, "Eastern Borderlands and Prospective Shatter Zones: Identity and Conflict in East Central and Southeastern Europe on the Eve of the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 27–30.

[18] Philipp Ther, "Pre-Negotiated Violence: Ethnic Cleansing in the 'Long' First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 259–62; Eric Weitz, "From Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008): 1313–43.

[19] Ther, "Pre-Negotiated Violence," 267–68.

[20] Gregor Thum, "Imperialists in Panic: The Evocation of Empire at Germany's Eastern Frontier around 1900," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear, and Radicalization*, ed. Gregor Thum and Maurus Reinkowski (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 140–42, 153-154.; Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum, "Helpless Imperialists: Introduction," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 12–15.

[21] William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), VII.; Elizabeth A. Drummond, "From 'Verloren Gehen' to 'Verloren Bleiben': Changing German Discourses on Nation and Nationalism in Poznania," in *The Germans and the East*, ed. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 236; Philipp Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte: Polen, slawophone Minderheiten und das Kaiserreich als kontinentales Empire," in *Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006), 45.

[22] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 320.

[23] Gregor Thum, "Megalomania and Angst: The Nineteenth-Century Mythicization of Germany's Eastern Borderlands," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 55; Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 320.

[24] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.

ensuring Germany's absolute control in occupied regions.[25] She accordingly portrays German military figures as stubbornly committed to annexing a long list of territories, and suggests that military figures broadly favored securing these regions through aggressive policies of nationalizing ethnic management. Falkenhayn, Ludendorff, and Hindenburg are all identified with an expansive vision of annexations, including a large Polish border-strip, based in large part upon Pan-German designs.[26] Arguing that the army enjoyed outsized influence due to its unique constitutional position in the German Empire, Hull suggests that civilian leaders in Berlin were cajoled, brow-beaten, or dragooned into accepting the army's plans for the annexation and aggressive Germanization of a large swath of Polish territory.[27]

The recent flood of research on German colonialism has likewise fortified the prevailing view that most of Germany's leadership and influential intellectuals already favored securing control over territory through the rigid suppression of native populations and subsequent Germanization. Two distinct colonial narratives of modern German imperialism have emerged. The first focuses on the policies, methods, and lessons which German imperialists garnered from their experiences of conquering and ruling colonial space in Africa. The second emphasizes the persistent infiltration of colonialist rhetoric, assumptions, and ideologies into broader German imperialist discourse, and its influence on how Germans viewed their place in Europe.

Proponents of the first line of argument have contended that the 19th century partition and governance of Africa by European powers equipped German imperialists with new methods of ethnic management, even as experiences of colonial rule conditioned Germans to see the violent suppression of native resistance as indispensible for the durable control over territory. Germany's efforts to rule its colonies in Africa, they argue, directly informed and inspired how German intellectuals and policy-makers in Berlin thought about establishing German hegemony in Eastern Europe. Scholars have emphasized that racial theories and hierarchical classifications developed to theoretically justify colonial rule were retooled by imperialists to assert the natural superiority of the German people over Slavic populations.[28] Strategies of strict legal and social segregation developed to police these racial hierarchies in the colonies inspired proposals for similar measures in Germany.[29] Anti-miscegenation laws in Southwest Africa developed in 1905 to rigorously preserve the colonial racial hierarchy inspired nationalist calls for similar measures to defend racial purity in the German Empire.[30] The scramble to secure territory for the future of the German nation likewise incubated an obsession among German intellectuals with securing space to sustain continued German demographic growth.[31] Friedrich Ratzel, for instance, developed his conviction that races naturally battled each other over *Lebensraum* in part based on his studies of German settlement prospects in Southwest Africa.[32]

Most importantly, proponents of this narrative have argued that colonialism habituated many Germans to understand the application of massive violence as necessary for the maintenance of German rule over restive areas. Jürgen Zimmerer has suggested that colonial warfare broke long established taboos, instantiating the deliberate murder of prisoners of war and the targeting of civilian populations in scorched-earth counterinsurgency operations as acceptable response to native resistance.[33] Others have focused on the influence of colonial crises

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 201.
[27] Ibid. 200–204.
[28] Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte," 146–48; Birthe Kundrus, "From the Periphery to the Center: On the Significance of Colonialism for the German Empire," in *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives*, ed. Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 256.
[29] Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005): 438–39; Jürgen Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination," *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (2005): 206–8.
[30] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 438–39.
[31] Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism," 200–205, 217.
[32] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 433.
[33] Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism," 208–10.

on attitudes towards imperial rule. The German Empire's genocidal suppression of the Herero and Nama revolts in Southwest Africa, some have argued, introduced the extermination of entire populations as an articulated and pursued policy goal to achieve the unassailable control over new *Lebensraum* for German settlers.[34] Historians have emphasized that these violent 'lessons' acquired in the colonies directly shaped how German imperialists thought about expansion on the European continent. Dennis Sweeney has convincingly demonstrated that the Herero and Nama revolts in Southwest Africa deeply affected Pan-Germans' fantasies of hegemony in Europe.[35] In response to Germany's jarring loss of control in Southwest Africa, Pan-German thinkers became obsessed with guaranteeing German rule in territories through sweeping demographic reengineering.[36] The Pan-Germans' calls to stabilize German rule through the massacre, deportation, surveillance, and dispossession of African populations, soon reverberated in the League's post-1903 vision for European hegemony.[37] The Pan-German League thus adopted a racialized definition of Polish identity, which it had previously rejected, and developed new schemes for expansion into Congress Poland based on the creation of "empty" space through "evacuations" of restive foreign populations.[38] Bradley Naranch has similarly pointed to how debates over colonial reform after 1906 reinforced the ethos of colonial mastery and racial rule among radical nationalists.[39]

In a slight variation of this narrative, some have suggested that German imperialists drew from a common toolbox when crafting policies to manage populations in both African colonies and the Prussian *Ostmark*. Sebastian Conrad notes that knowledge and policies transferred frequently between colonies in Africa and the Prussian East, in large part because colonial officials and Prussian bureaucrats often sought to resolve similar challenges.[40] Both sought to preserve Germany national vitality by diverting the flow of emigrants from America to German controlled territory. Both aimed to increase the *Lebensraum* of the German nation and foster its future demographic growth. When seasonal Polish agricultural labor spiked in the 1880s, and sparked concerns about German control of the *Ostmark*, Conrad argues that Prussia's response closely paralleled German colonial policies.[41] He cites Prussia's settlement efforts, and its surveillance of Polish laborers through identification cards and border controls.[42] Calls for the disenfranchisement of Poles, their legal segregation as quasi-colonial subjects, and even the demographic reengineering of the *Ostmark* through Polish deportations, already circulated in German political discourse before the war, and naturally fostered similar wartime proposals for ruling Annexed Polish territory.[43] Pointing to the 1886 settlement commission and the subsequent 1908 expropriation law in Prussia, some historians have even taken to referring to West Prussia and Posen as Germany's "ersatz colony".[44]

The second major strand of this scholarship has suggested that Germans increasingly

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[34] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 433, 441–42; David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 10.
[35] Dennis Sweeney, "Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 302–19.
[36] Ibid., 311.
[37] Ibid., 311–13.
[38] Ibid., 313–15.
[39] Bradley Naranch, "'Colonized Body,' 'Oriental Machine': Debating Race, Railroads, and the Politics of Reconstruction in Germany and East Africa, 1906-1910," *Central European History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 306.
[40] Sebastian Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany: Culture Wars, Germanification of the Soil, and the Global Market Imaginary," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 297–98.
[41] Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144, 215.
[42] Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 149–52.
[43] Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, 25; Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 287–88.
[44] Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54–55; David Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Eine Skizze," in *Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Deutschland in Der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006).

thought of Poland and Eastern Europe as colonial space, a view which translated into broad official and public support, or at least tolerance, for violent and repressive strategies of rule during WWI. Kristin Kopp has argued that Germans developed a colonial "conceptual framework" of German-Polish relations in the 19th century, largely in order to justify Prussia's continuing ownership of the *Ostmark* by claiming that German stewardship was necessary to 'civilize' the supposedly ignorant Poles and cure the region of its barbarism.[45] Germans, she argues, engaged in a "discursive colonization" of Poland, depicting Poles as primitive indigenes incapable of their own self-governance and desperately in need of the tutelage of a ruling caste of German *Kulturträger*.[46] Even hydrological and environmental engineering projects in the East were increasingly celebrated as an effort to civilize a Slavic "morass".[47] Failure to intervene, Germans writers asserted, risked the spread of Polish barbarism westward, and the corruption of the German nation.[48] Kopp and others have argued that this portrayal of Poles as irredeemable barbarians, became hegemonic in the final decades of the 19th century, and was employed to justify first the Germanization of the *Ostmark*, then its colonization with German settlers, and finally its ethnic cleansing.[49] Other historians have broadened this argument, suggesting that Wilhelmine Germans had begun to regard virtually all of Eastern Europe as a space for the German Empire to play out fantasies of a civilizing mission or frontier myth.[50] A hegemonic "mindscape" or "German myth of the East", is therefore portrayed as encouraging German imperialists to take up their own civilizing mission and master the barbaric and chaotic peoples of Eastern Europe.[51]

These colonial narratives converge in a common interpretation of WWI, with scholars emphasizing colonialism's pervasive and nefarious influence on how Germans conceived of ruling space in Poland and Eastern Europe. Historians have thus claimed that widely-accepted depictions of Poland as colonial space were employed to establish Germany's right to colonize vast swathes of Eastern Europe after 1914.[52] Scholars point, in particular, to the rhetoric of Pan-Germans like Heinrich Class, who used portrayals of Poles as barbarians to support the annexation of a Polish border-strip, and its subsequent ethnic cleansing.[53] Other scholars have emphasized that similar war aims proposals drew inspiration from prior overseas colonization effort, or took cues from precedents of colonial administration in Africa.[54] Pan-Germans who had

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[45] Kristin Kopp, "Arguing the Case for a Colonial Poland," in *German Colonialism : Race, the Holocaust and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 147; Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 7–8, 16–17. See also Robert L Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 65, 74–80.

[46] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 6, 19; Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte," 133.

[47] Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich Transnational," 323.

[48] Robert L Nelson, "Colonialism in Europe? The Case Against Salt Water," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5; Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte," 132–34, 138; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 6.

[49] Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 283–84; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 23; Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 65, 74–80; Sönke Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik: Das Beispiel der 'Preußischen Jahrbücher' (1886-1914)," in *Cultural Landscapes: Transatlantische Perspektiven auf Wirkungen und Auswirkungen deutscher Kultur und Geschichte im östlichen Europa*, ed. Andrew Demshuk and Tobias Weger (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015), 71–73; Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich Transnational," 323.

[50] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East, 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

[51] Ibid., 5–7; Thum, "Megalomania and Angst," 54.

[52] Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 98–129.

[53] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 125.

[54] Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 65, 81, 85–86; Robert L Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space: Forced Population Transfer Fantasies during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014), 113–14. Jesse Kauffman, Winson Chu, and Michael Meng have also criticized the emergence of a new narrative of a German "pathological expansionism" and anti-Slavism based on studies of German colonialism. Jesse Kauffman, Winson Chu, and Michael Meng, "A Sonderweg through

honed their vision of German rule in response to prior crises in Southwest Africa and East Africa, now laid out their racialized vision of a German Empire in Eastern Europe.[55] Alfred Hugenberg, the co-founder of the Pan-German league, essentially recycled an earlier proposal for racial segregation in the colonies, now suggesting similar policies to ensure Germans' long-term rule in the East.[56] Others petitioned Berlin to rule conquered Poles as a legally subordinated "subject" people, devoid of any legal recourse against the decisions of an autocratic colonial-style German administration.[57]

These bodies of literature all convey a fundamental continuity in Germany's approach to imperial management reaching from the German Empire through the violent expansionism of Nazi Germany. Whether based upon a crisis of authoritarian legitimacy, Prussia's dysfunctional relationship with its Polish-speaking minority, an arrogant and extreme military culture, or the echoes of European colonialism, this scholarship has concluded that the political culture and leadership of the German Empire already considered cultural or ethnic diversity antipathetic to imperial stability by the beginning of WWI. National Socialism's vision of a racially German Empire, built upon the violent ethnic cleansing or enslavement of vast swathes of Eastern Europe, is thus presented as firmly rooted in the discourse and political culture of Wilhelmine German imperialism.[58] Fischer and Geiss both drew continuities between Germany's aims in WWI and National Socialism, especially in regards to Poland. Geiss described proposals for a Polish border-strip as a "glimpse into the pre-history of National Socialism" which revealed the latter's roots in the "*völkisch* ideology of the Wilhelmine epoch".[59] For him, National Socialism's genocidal plans for the reorganization of Poland and the Soviet Union simply reprised the well worn "*Ostraumideologie*" and expansionist plans already established in WWI.[60] Liulevicius emphasizes that the subtle shift in imperialists' views of Eastern Europe from a region of "lands and peoples" to a region of "races and spaces" served as one of the basic assumptions for National Socialist efforts to purge conquered space of its irredeemably barbaric inhabitants.[61] For Hull, the same military culture which promoted an aggressive model of nationalizing imperialism and routinely committed violence against civilian populations later served Hitler's purposes well.[62] Gregor Thum has described the 1939 occupation of Poland as essentially fulfilling decades old nationalist ambitions to Germanize and secure Polish space, though now unrestrained by the rule of law.[63] Finally, many scholars of German colonialism have integrated the German Empire, its aims in WWI, Weimar political culture, and the Third Reich into a long arc of pathological antipathy and aggression towards the peoples of Eastern Europe. Whether inspired by colonial precedents, or based upon the advanced "discursive colonization" of nations like Poland, this scholarship has rooted the Nazi occupation of Poland, the invasion of the Soviet Union, and *Generalplan Ost* firmly in pre-1914 habits and assumptions of German imperialism.[64]

Eastern Europe? The Varieties of German Rule in Poland during the Two World Wars," *German History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 321.

[55] Sweeney, "Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire," 315; Naranch, "'Colonized Body,' 'Oriental Machine,'" 306, 326–33.

[56] Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 287–88.

[57] Friedrich Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," January 1916, 161–69, R1501/119780, BArch.

[58] Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 3–6.

[59] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 148–49.

[60] Ibid., 149.

[61] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 9, 220, 252; Liulevicius, "German Military Occupation and Culture on the Eastern Front in World War I," 207.

[62] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 1–4, 324–33.

[63] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 148. See also Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, VIII, 168, 320.

[64] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 206–10; Kopp, "Arguing the Case for a Colonial Poland," 146–47; Liulevicius, "German Military Occupation and Culture on the Eastern Front in World War I," 201; Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte," 141–46; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 15–30; Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism," 211-212,217; Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 453–55; Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 3–6. One should note here that a number of historian's have prominently contested the notion of direct continuity between 19th century imperialism and the imperialism espoused by the Nazi regime. Several scholar's have noted substantial differences between the two, including Nazism's lack of a 'civilizing mission' to justify its naked conquest, the centrality of

Recent work has contested the widely accepted view that German imperialism had already become pathologically hostile to Poles by the outbreak of war in 1914. Focusing on economic policy, Stephan Lehnstaedt has argued that German occupied-Poland bore almost no resemblance to the rapacious exploitation of Ober Ost by military authorities. The Baltic, he suggests, was a unique case due to the military's unchallenged authority and the "utopian claims associated with it".[65] Imperial Germany's requisition policies in Congress Poland did not resemble the later methods or aims of Nazism.[66] Jesse Kauffman's recent work on the German occupation of Poland in WWI has also forcefully argued that Germany's imperial aims differed in both "degree" and in "kind" from later Nazi objectives.[67] Kauffman convincingly demonstrates the German occupation's genuine and serious effort to establish an autonomous Polish state as a protectorate of the German Empire.[68] Authorities of the Government General of Warsaw [*Generalgouvernement Warschau* or GGW] invested significant resources and efforts in building a Polish state. They opened a Polish speaking university and polytechnic in Warsaw and reopened public schools across the occupied zone, staffed by local teachers and using Polish as the language of instruction. They established new representative institutions of local self-governance, and worked to organize a central administration and state government. German commanders even began training a Polish national army.[69] For Kauffman, the occupation's reorganization of the University of Warsaw as a Polish cultural institution shows clear discontinuity, both with pre-war colonial precedents and with the later vandalism of National Socialism.[70]

Kauffman's work has emphasized the central role of Governor General Hans Hartwig von Beseler's "political imagination" in articulating and promoting such a pro-Polish occupation policy for the German Empire.[71] While Kauffman does not suggest that the idea for a Polish protectorate sprung from Beseler's head fully formed, he presents the Governor General as uniquely responsible for developing this strategy and convincing the imperial government to adopt it. His vision of a Polish state bound to the German Empire is presented as diverging from, or at least outside of, the contemporary nationalist discourse which generated more coercive approaches to ruling Polish space.

The subsequent chapters will argue otherwise. In 1914, multinationalism represented a viable model of imperial organization to German intellectuals and leaders in Berlin, one which they considered a credible and attractive alternative to nationalizing models of ethnic management. Multinational imperialism neither ran against the grain of German nationalism, nor did it develop in isolation from a broader nationalist discourse. On the contrary, multinational imperialism was so attractive to the publicists and policy-makers of the German Empire precisely because its firm rooting in the narratives, assumptions, and traditions of German national discourse made it easily legible to contemporaries. Multinational imperialism was not a

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prophylactic and state-sponsored violence to Nazi imperialism, and prominent Nazi's explicit and conscious rejection of prior models of colonial rule, including the British rule in India. Robert Gerwath and Stephan Malinowski, "Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz," *Central European History* 42, no. 2 (June 2009): 293; Birthe Kundrus, Bradley Naranch, and Geoff Eley, "Colonialism, Imperialism, National Socialism: How Imperial Was the Third Reich?," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 386–95. While some have contested the direct continuity between 19th century colonialist policy and Nazi imperialism, the latter's basis in the 19th century "discursive colonization" of Eastern European nations has been generally accepted.

[65] Stephan Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation: Occupied East Central Europe during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 112.

[66] Ibid., 105.

[67] Jesse Kauffman, "Sovereingty and the Search for Order in German-Occupied Poland, 1915-1918" (Stanford University, 2008), 11, 191, 239; Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 10.

[68] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 19.

[69] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 4.

[70] Jesse Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation: State Building and Nation Bildung in Poland during the Great War," *First World War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 67.

[71] See, for example Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 13, 19.

digression from German nationalist tradition, but the product of a particular discourse of German nationalism. By 1914, German national discourse had indeed produced the pathological fantasies of racial dominance entertained by groups like the Pan-German League. But it had also nurtured an alternative, and uniquely inclusive vision of empire throughout the 19th century. These two visions of empire clashed in the first two years of WWI, both in public and in the offices of the imperial government and military leadership. German multinational imperialists were acutely aware of the mobilizing strength of nationalist politics, and the potential challenge of nationalism to imperial expansion. But they believed they had developed appropriate constitutional tools to manage these forces and bend them to their own ends. They articulated their own vision of modern ethnic organization, based on federalist guarantees of political and cultural autonomy, and the mutual recognition of minority cultural rights.

The first four chapters of this dissertation offer a close examination of the competing models of imperial organization circulating in German political discourse during the war. Chapter one argues that from 1914 to 1916, the public debate over German aims in Congress Poland centered on how to most effectively manage the Polish population to achieve German strategic objectives. In particular, parties focused on whether or not Poles could be trusted to serve German imperial interests. Worried that Polish nationalists would resist German rule, nationalist groups like the Pan-German league infamously proposed securing Berlin's permanent control over annexed territory through the repression of Polish culture, aggressive colonization, and ethnic cleansing. However, an influential group of publicists, intellectuals, and politicians promoted an alternative multinational strategy for securing German hegemony in Poland. Multinationalists rejected the conceit that the Polish nation was irreconcilably hostile to German interests. They believed that Germany and Poland had common strategic interests, and that Berlin could manipulate Polish national sentiment with relative ease. Multinationalists proposed a grand compromise with Polish nationalists, wherein Germany would trade political autonomy for Poles' loyalty to the German Empire. Berlin would secure its eastern frontier by controlling Poland's foreign policy and wartime military command, but otherwise refrain from interfering in Polish domestic affairs. Multinational imperial projects in Poland were promoted by writers across the German political spectrum, but garnered particularly strong support from left liberals, moderate Conservatives, and Roman Catholics. From 1914 to 1916, multinationalist proposals for Poland competed vigorously with nationalist models of imperialism. Both supporters and opponents believed that multinational proposals for Poland were gaining widespread public and official support in the debate over war aims.

Chapter two argues that colonial precedents and intellectual frameworks did not, as many historians have recently argued, predominantly shape or inspire German imperial projects in WWI. Rather, multinational imperialism built upon an explicit recognition of Poland as a civilized and politically capable nation. Many German multinationalists actually supported Germany's brutal rule over its African colonies. However, they neither portrayed Poles as incompetent primitives, nor did they recommend the adoption of colonial strategies of rule and ethnic management in Poland. On the contrary, German multinationalists insisted that because Poland was a civilized occidental nation with a robust culture and a proven history of state-building, Poles could be expected effectively resist any attempt to rule Congress Poland as a colony, or otherwise repress Polish culture. Their faith that Polish nationalism could support political organization also reinforced their confidence that a Polish protectorate could effectively defend Germany's eastern flank. Recognition of Poland as a civilized nation was decisive in promulgating support for multinational imperialism. Many Germans who supported multinational imperialism in Poland, simultaneously recommended annexing and Germanizing territories on the Baltic coast of Russia, primarily because they believed that local cultures would not be able to mobilize effective resistance against linguistic Germanization efforts.

Chapter three contends that German multinationalists portraits of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empire as negative and positive archetypes of ethnic management. Multinationalists' accusations that Russia was a "barbaric empire" [*Barbarenreich*] articulated a clear set of ethical boundaries for imperial practice. Historians often cite German descriptions of Russia as "barbaric" or "uncivilized" to argue that German perceptions of Slavs in WWI already resembled

the later racial hostility of National Socialism. Multinationalists, however, argued that the Russian Empire was barbaric because of its historic and contemporary efforts to repress or Russify culturally productive nations like Poland. When multinationalists described Russia as a *Barbarenreich*, they were in fact casting policies of homogenization and ethnic cleansing as injurious to human welfare and progress, and as uncivilized methods of imperial governance. Castigating Russia for this "barbarism" of course reinforced their argument that Poland and Germany should unite to defend against a common enemy. However, it also implicitly censured Pan-German and nationalizing imperial projects as unworthy of German national *Kultur*.

Conversely, German multinationalists' views of the Austro-Hungarian Empire demonstrate that they considered national pluralism to be integral to Germany's future imperial order. Multinationalists carefully watched the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the first years of the war. They argued that the imperial loyalty demonstrated by the various nations of Austria-Hungary proved the theoretical viability of a multinational states. German multinationalists identified the Habsburg Empire as an inspiration for their own imperial project. They argued that Berlin should study, and improve upon, Austria-Hungary's methods for managing their diverse populations. They did not desire to parse Eastern Europe into homogenous nation-states, nor did they hope that German culture would infiltrate Poland after the war.

Chapter four argues that German national political culture did not exclusively encourage chauvinistic fantasies of dominance in Eastern Europe. Rather, multinationalist proposals for Poland built upon Germany's own federalist tradition. German multinationalists believed that the federalist constitution of the German Empire offered an effective model for balancing regional particularism with the needs of common imperial defense. A widely shared federalist interpretation of German nationhood simultaneously fortified support for multinational imperialism. Federal nationalism understood cultural diversity as natural and even beneficial for German national progress. Federal nationalists had long argued that regional autonomy and the protection of pluralism actually reinforced the unity, and therefore strength, of the German Empire. Multinationalists explicitly cited the success of German federalism to argue that a Polish state, in a federal constitutional relationship with Germany, would reliably contribute to the security and creativity of the empire. Just as the Bavarian army fought for Berlin, so too, multinationalists insisted, would an autonomous Poland defend and enrich the German Empire.

Having established the nature of the public argument over ethnic management in Congress Poland, chapter five will investigate how the German Empire's military and civilian leadership grappled with these issues and ultimately decided how to govern Polish space. The occupation government in Poland, the Army High Command, the Prussian government, and the various agencies of the imperial government all wrestled with this question, and drew heavily upon arguments circulating in public debates. But support for the creation of a Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty grew steadily within government and military circles. Support or opposition to multinationalism did not conform to institutional divisions between military and civilian leaders, or between the Imperial and Prussian governments. Instead, willingness to endorse multinational war aims depended on whether observers trusted that Poles would accept German suzerainty for the sake mutual security. Military and civilian leaders had no illusions that Congress Poles would enthusiastically welcome a German-Polish union. However, German planners concluded that they could assemble a coalition of influential Polish social, intellectual, and political elites in favor of multinational union. These elites, German imperialists hoped, would gradually cultivate support for German suzerainty among the broader Polish population. In the summer and autumn of 1916, Germany's civilian and military leadership reached a broad consensus in support of multinational imperialism, and officially proclaimed a Kingdom of Poland on 5 November 1916. For the moment, German elites believed that a German-Polish union offered the best prospect for Germany's future security.

The subsequent development and eventual collapse of the German occupation of Poland has received far less historiographical attention than Germany's initial war aims program. This is understandable. For those arguing for a fundamental continuity of German imperial methods between WWI and WWII, the development and eventual collapse of the occupation are of secondary significance. Indeed, one of Geiss's central theses is the consistency of the German

Empire's annexationist and nationalizing agenda in Poland. Historians who have examined the later stages of the occupation have come to differing conclusions. Werner Conze, an early historian the occupation, concluded that the later years of the occupation demonstrated that Poles would have never accepted German suzerainty in the long-term. He suggested that German and Polish interests were fundamentally irreconcilable and that Germany's multinationalist policy was doomed to failure.[72] Kauffman's interpretation of the occupation functions almost as the mirror image of Geiss's analysis of German war aims. Kauffman vividly demonstrates the German Empire's persistent commitment to implementing Beseler's imperial program, even in the face of significant challenges later in the war. Focused on the occupation's continued state-building efforts in Congress Poland, Kauffman's research is less interested in how German imperial policy evolved in response to occupation experiences and shifting perceptions of Poles. Kauffman suggests that the occupation left a lasting impression on German political discourse, but he believes this legacy derived mainly from the sudden collapse of German authority. In particular, Kauffman argues that the inglorious surrender of the German occupation in 1918 and the subsequent loss of territory to Poland shamed and humiliated Germans, producing a lasting animus towards Poland in Weimar political culture.[73]

This dissertation will argue that the final years of WWI decisively transformed how Germans understood ethnic management and imperial organization. Chapter six contends that the later years of the occupation severely tested the foundational assumptions of multinational imperialism among German policy-makers and the public more broadly. After 1916, a series of political crises in occupied Poland eroded Germans' confidence that Polish nationalism could be compatible with loyalty to a German imperial structure. Critics argued that these crises proved that creating a Kingdom of Poland would only equip treacherous Poles with a political and military apparatus to use against Germany. Several German writers publicly abandoned their prior support for multinational union with an autonomous Poland. German military and political elites lost also confidence that an autonomous Polish state would fortify German security. In particular, they increasingly doubted that Germany would be able to find a reliable cadre of Polish elites who would be willing to cultivate support for a German-Polish union among the broader Polish population. Even if Berlin could, German policy-makers began to suspect that Polish elites would not be able to reshape the national sentiments of the Polish masses in a pro-German direction. Though Germany continued to build a Kingdom of Poland until the end of the war, Berlin quietly adjusted its policy to reduce the size and military potential of the future state. As German leaders lost faith in multinationalism, Polish policy shifted emphasis from developing and collaborating with a valuable ally, to containing a potentially threatening rival. The conclusion will consider the long-term consequences of multinationalism's loss of credibility during WWI.

The Complex Legacy of Prussian Ostmarkenpolitik

By the time Germany seized Congress Poland in the summer of 1915, military commanders and German administrators could draw upon decades of Prussian experience in governing Polish space. A significant Polish-speaking minority had populated the Kingdom of Prussia since the first Partition of Poland in 1772. The provinces of East Prussia, West Prussia, Posen, and Silesia, also known as the *Ostmark*, all had substantial Polish-speaking populations, and Berlin had grappled with how to manage their cultural and political claims for more than a century. Here Prussian administrators had already confronted the problem of ensuring political stability in a region where the alternative national identities could generate political loyalties which competed with the claims of the state. In 1914, Prussia's relationship with its Polish minority deeply affected how Germans understood Polish nationhood and its relationship with political loyalty, as well as their assessment of various models of ethnic management.

Decades of Prussian attempts to linguistically Germanize its Polish-speaking minority had yielded poor results. Despite Berlin's control of public education, few Poles had adopted the

[72] Werner Conze, *Polnische Nation und deutsche Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Cologne: Böhlau-Verlag, 1958), 404.
[73] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 11, 214–19.

German language as their primary means of communication. By 1914, most Germans considered Prussia's effort to turn Poles into Germans to have failed, and believed that further linguistic Germanization would be futile. Recognition of this failure forced interested Germans to reconsider how Berlin should manage the political and cultural claims associated with Polish national identity, and how to best ensure that Polish nationalism would not threaten the integrity of the Prussian state and the German Empire. Some observers infamously concluded that the stability of the German Empire could only be guaranteed if the ethnic German population of the *Ostmark* significantly outnumbered the Polish population. They hoped that demographic predominance and German ownership of land in the *Ostmark* would reduce Poles' social and political influence, undercut competing Polish nationalist claims to the region, and discourage Polish resistance to German rule. Some Germans began to propose expropriating Polish property and even expelling Polish subjects from the *Ostmark* to finally remove the threat of Polish secession once and for all.

The experiences of Prussia's 19th century *Ostmarkenpolitik* did not, however, merely radicalize Prusso-German efforts to Germanize Polish space. The legacy of Prussian rule was more ambiguous than that. While the obvious failure of linguistic Germanization did produce more coercive methods of nationalization, it also convinced many Prussian officials and observers that nationalization was counter-productive. They argued that Poles were predominantly loyal to the Prussian state, and that Germanization had only succeeded in alienating Poles. More coercive efforts to Germanize the *Ostmark*, they argued, would likewise fail, would exacerbate Poles' distrust of Berlin, and would conflict with the basic mores of German civilization. By 1914, voices within the Prussian and German governments, and throughout the German public, were calling for a relaxation of Germanization policies, and a broader German-Polish reconciliation.

Prussia's prewar *Ostmarkenpolitik*, therefore, did not provide a universally accepted model of ethnic management for expansion into Congress Poland. The only undisputed lesson of pre-war *Ostmarkenpolitik* was that linguistic Germanization could not be expected to convert any large number of Poles. Aside from this, German policy-makers inherited an ongoing debate over ethnic management, which foreshadowed the basic divisions between nationalization and multinationalism.

Prussian policy had evolved rapidly since the mid-19th century in response to growing concerns that Polish nationalists would mobilize Polish-speakers to challenge Berlin's rule. Until then, Berlin had focused its political strategy in the region on cultivating loyalty to the state, and undercutting the political influence and independence of the *szlachta,* the Polish gentry who had effectively ruled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the First Partition of Poland in 1772, Friedrich II had broadly refrained from any attempts to suppress use of the Polish language or Polish cultural expression.[74] Fearing that the *szlachta* might be tempted to regain their privileges and status through the restoration of Polish-Lithuanian rule, Friedrich II had worked to bind the nobility to the institutions of the Prussian state. He opened, for instance, a new cadet academy in Kulm to train the sons of the Polish nobility, and granted loyal nobles official positions in the state.[75] The Prussian King had also limited the political influence of the *szlachta*. He had refused, for instance to establish county diets (*Kreistage*) in the newly annexed region, fearing that these would become forums for organizing noble resistance.[76] As a result of the massive expansion of Prussian territory in the Second and Third Partitions of Poland, Berlin had welcomed Polish nobles into the army and administration out of practical necessity.[77] Over the long term, policy-makers in Berlin predicted that Polish commoners would gradually develop fluency in German to communicate with the state, but they did not consider the survival of Polish language or culture to be incompatible with Prussian loyalism.[78]

[74] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 38.
[75] Ibid., 39.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 55–58.
[78] Ibid., 44.

When the Congress of Vienna redrew the map of East Central Europe in 1815, Berlin chose to delegate a degree of cultural and political autonomy to its Polish territories. This decision was based in part on earlier proposals of reformers like Karl von Stein, who had suggested establishing a distinct regional government for the Polish lands in order to bind their people more closely to the Prussian crown.[79] Prussia thus established a semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Posen with the explicit promise that its Polish subjects would not be required to surrender their nationality.[80] Prince Antoni Radziwiłł was indeed made viceroy for the Grand Duchy, which enjoyed its own provincial diet. Polish gentry were given posts in the administration. Polish was accepted as an official language in primary education and for interactions with the judiciary, though higher education remained German.[81]

This equilibrium was by no means stable. Learning German was a practical prerequisite for obtaining a post in the Prussian bureaucracy, one which effectively barred many ambitious Poles from this key venue of political power and social advancement. Polish elites demanded Polish as a language of instruction in higher education, as well as greater political autonomy for the Grand Duchy of Posen.[82] Prussian officials also distrusted Polish motives. When a Polish revolt challenged the Tsar's rule over the neighboring Kingdom of Poland in 1830, Berlin embarked on a new Polish policy, which aimed to undermine the political authority of Polish elites.[83] Polish gentry lost the right to nominate candidates for open *Landrat* positions, offices which would thereafter by filled by Germans.[84] Radziwiłł was dismissed and the viceroyalty abolished. German became the exclusive language of civic administration, and a heavier police presence was established in Polish regions in order to closely monitor any nationalist activity.[85] Still, the Prussian state showed some restraint. Berlin attempted to foster the loyalty of Polish commoners, and did not seek to broach their basic linguistic rights outside of the context of administrative communication.[86] The conservative Friedrich Wilhelm IV was sympathetic to the *szlachta* and offered renewed linguistic concessions in the 1840s.[87]

Prussian policy shifted in the latter half of the 19th century as Germans began to perceive Polish national culture as a more acute threat. The revolutions of 1848 demonstrated the potential power of nationalism to mobilize significant segments of the population against the state, and stoked fears that Polish nationalists might attempt to organize a popular revolt against Prussian rule. During the revolution, Polish leaders had organized a National Committee in the Grand Duchy of Posen, and renewed their demands for more authentic political autonomy.[88] They had also organized a Polish Legion, ostensibly to take up arms against any reactionary intervention from Russia. After negotiating over the political reorganization of Posen, Berlin had ultimately chosen to dissolve the Legions, and had skirmished with militia's which refused to disband in the spring of 1849.[89] In the wake of the revolution, Posen lost much of its autonomy. Prussia introduced more stringent censorship and clamped down on Polish political associations.[90] The 1850s also saw more determined efforts by Berlin to Germanize the local bureaucracy and education system.[91] The massive Polish revolt against Russian rule in 1863 only reinforced the perceived threat of Polish nationalism to the Prussian state.

1848 had also uncovered tensions between the Polish and German nationalist movements. Up through the revolution, German and Polish nationalists had often considered themselves

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[79] Ibid., 76–78.
[80] Ibid., 78–79.
[81] Ibid., 82.
[82] Ibid., 83–84.
[83] Ibid., 87.
[84] Ibid., 88.
[85] Ibid., 88–89.
[86] Ibid., 89.
[87] Ibid., 91.
[88] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 120.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 111.
[91] Ibid., 121–22.

natural allies, fighting a common struggle for popular sovereignty against reactionary monarchies. But debates in the Frankfurt parliament over the inclusion of Polish territory in Germany, as well as the outbreak of violence in Posen, had revealed the difficulty in cleanly parsing apart valuable territory to the satisfaction of both parties. The German nationalist movement broadly supported the inclusion of the *Ostmark* in a future German state, but now faced the difficulty of theoretically justifying German control over territory where there was a significant Polish-speaking minority, or even a majority.[92] One response was to delegitimize Polish national claims through an act of "discursive colonization". German nationalist authors, politicians, and intellectuals began to depict Poles as primitive, culturally inferior, incapable of governing their own affairs, and therefore dependent upon German tutelage for their own welfare.[93] Authors developed a standard portrait of German-Polish relations, wherein feckless, uncultured, and disorganized Poles relied on German administration to bring order to their country.[94] Gustav Freytag's 1855 novel, *Soll und Haben*, has become the prototypical example of this trope, depicting Polish space as a primitive wasteland, virtually devoid of infrastructure or human industry, until the rational management of German landowners introduces order and cultivation to the region.[95]

German unification in 1871 only sharpened anxieties about Prussia's Polish-speaking minority and its potential threat to Germany's newfound political integrity. Contemporary Germans shared a remarkably coherent interpretation of Central Europe's recent history, one which equated German political disunity and military weakness with a chronicle of historic humiliations and disasters.[96] The 'fratricidal' warfare among German states and the absence of a united and powerful German state, this narrative suggested, had exposed Central Europe to predatory interventions of foreign powers, including subsequent French efforts to subjugate German territory from Louis XIV to the catastrophic invasions of Napoleon.[97] German historians and writers often identified the Protestant reformation as the original sin of the German nation, arguing that the resulting confessional split had fractured the cultural and political unity of the Holy Roman Empire. The resulting confessional and constitutional struggles between Protestant princes and Catholic imperial loyalists had invited intervention by foreign powers interested in undermining German power or advancing their own confessional or strategic gains, a process which culminated in the catastrophe of the Thirty Years War.[98] Contemporary Germans understood the resulting Peace of Westphalia as further enervating the Holy Roman Empire, effectively preventing Germans from defending and asserting their own interests. In short, Germans regarded Central European history as a powerful warning against disunity.

Conversely, German nationalists celebrated the formation of the German Empire in 1871 as the triumphant unification of the German states into an empire large and centralized enough to effectively defend Germany from foreign predation. They portrayed the German Empire as finally reversing the catastrophes of previous centuries, replacing disunity and weakness with unity and strength.[99] Celebrations of the German Empire focused on the 1870 triumph of the united German states over the "hereditary enemy" of France, an event which became the focal point of the new empire's legitimacy.[100] Commemorations of the event explicitly contrasted the victorious Prussian-led effort against Napoleon III with the German states' previous fratricidal

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[92] Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte," 135–36.
[93] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 6–8, 19.
[94] Ibid., 6.
[95] Kristin Kopp, "Reinventing Poland as German Colonial Territory in the Nineteenth Century: Gustav Freytag's Soll Und Haben as Colonial Novel," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22.
[96] Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 47.
[97] Ibid., 61.
[98] Thomas Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1986), 64.
[99] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 63.
[100] Ibid., 47; Rebecca Ayako Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for Inclusion after Unification* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 24–28.

disunity and international weakness.[101]

However, political unification raised new anxieties regarding the cultural unity of the German nation. Many contemporary intellectuals subscribed to an integral nationalism which posited that only nations with robust cultural bonds could sustain political unity in the long term.[102] Diversity generated deep anxieties among German observers, especially within liberal and Protestant camps, who feared that cultural and religious heterogeneity would reproduce the damning fratricidal chaos of previous centuries. In particular, many German liberals worried that strong regional identities, Roman Catholicism, and non-German national identities would divide the loyalties of German citizens, undermine their commitment to defend the German Empire, and raise the probability of destabilizing internal strife.[103] This fear that cultural diversity threatened imperial integrity would haunt German political discourse through the duration of the German Empire. In September 1914, one writer would confess his enduring concerns about the Germany's national cohesion in the war effort.[104] Reprising the national narrative, he wrote that the "hereditary evil" of the German nation was the "disunity, the factionalism" which had so catastrophically sapped German strength in the past. He worried that even now Germany's various confessional, political, and ethnic loyalties threatened the solidarity of the German Empire.[105]

Influential nationalist historians like Heinrich von Sybel and Heinrich von Treitschke developed an obsession with backstopping German political unity with further political centralization and cultural homogenization.[106] The *Kulturkampf* was one manifestation of this obsession. Mounting support for a broader and more aggressive campaign of Germanization in the *Ostmark* was another. The German national narrative fundamentally shaped German perceptions of Polish identity. German nationalists regarded Polish national identity as an urgent threat, a vulnerability that could be exploited by Germany's rivals to pry apart the German Empire. They worried that Poles would betray Germany in a moment of crisis, either revolting in an effort to overthrow Prussian rule, or conspiring with one of Germany's foes to achieve political independence.

United by their suspicions that Poles did not regard the German Empire as legitimate and would work to subvert or overthrow German rule, Bismarck and German liberals launched new Prussian policies aiming to Germanize the Polish-speaking population of the *Ostmark*.[107] Berlin retracted the right to use Polish in legal proceedings and interactions with the Prussian bureaucracy.[108] In 1873-1874, the Prussian government issued a series of decrees establishing German as the sole language of instruction for elementary and secondary schooling.[109] Use of Polish was tolerated only during religious instruction. Prussian teachers were forbidden from joining Polish cultural associations.[110] This new campaign focused more explicitly on foisting German language and cultural norms onto all Polish-speaking subjects, and imagined that most Poles would eventually abandon their language and national identity in favor of a common German identity.[111]

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[101] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 47; Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 3–5.
[102] Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 9.
[103] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 17, 20, 58, 74, 134; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 17; Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict*, 19–23, 79; Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69–72.
[104] F.A. Geißler, "Wie der Krieg uns zusammenschmiedete," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 5, 1914): 641.
[105] Ibid., 641–42.
[106] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 79.
[107] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 125–29; Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, 12.
[108] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:127; Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* CXXVI, no. 522 (2011): 1140.
[109] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 129.
[110] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:127; Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1140.
[111] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 67–68.

This assimilation effort failed to make any significant headway. Indeed, the number of Polish-speaking Prussians, as well as the relative size of the Polish minority in the Prussian *Ostmark*, actually grew in the first decades after unification. The economic crisis of 1873 struck the Prussian agricultural market hard and unemployment in the east, paired with the rapid expansion of industry in western Germany had convinced many German-speaking residents to migrate westward.[112] If anything, Prussia's more aggressive Polish policy had only encouraged Poles to organize in response. Germanization policies offered a powerful incentive for Polish speakers to go to the ballot urn in support of Polish political parties. Mass support for the Polish national movement grew quickly, especially among the urban middle class.[113] Polish political leaders built effective electoral machines to mobilize voters and install Polish candidates in the *Reichstag* and the Prussian *Landtag*.[114] While the representatives of the Polish Fraktion espoused a position of fundamental loyalty to the Prussian state and German Empire, they stalwartly resisted Germanization efforts and demanded the restoration of Polish cultural and language rights.[115] Polish organizations established their own schools and cultural institutions to promote Polish education in the absence of state support.[116] In Posen the Society for Popular Education worked to sustain Polish literacy. In the 1880s the Society of Popular Reading began establishing Polish libraries across the *Ostmark*.[117] Social and political organization gave Polish-speaking Prussians an effective tool to resist further Germanization efforts.[118] But to Germans already suspicious of Polish loyalties, Poles' skillful political organization and growing demographic weight were frightening developments.

Believing assimilationist and linguistic Germanization policies to have failed, nationalists and Prussian officials began to contemplate new strategies for ensuring the long-term stability of the state. One response was to continue efforts to homogenize the population of the *Ostmark* through more aggressive means. Prussian Polish policy began shifting focus from the Germanization of people to the Germanization of space.[119] Berlin's efforts to suppress the threat of Polish nationalism increasingly focused on controlling and arresting the growth of the Polish-speaking population, reducing its size, and rolling back the amount of land owned by Polish Prussians.[120] In 1885 Bismarck opted to expel 30,000 non-naturalized Poles and Jews from eastern Prussia.[121] The following year, Berlin established the Royal Prussian Settlement Commission for the purpose of buying Polish-estates in the *Ostmark* and parceling them to prospective German settlers.[122]

A whole panoply of nationalist pressure groups emerged to support more this more aggressive model of nationalization. The Pan-German League [*Alldeutscher Verband*], founded in 1891, consistently supported Prussian Germanization efforts. In 1894, supporters of Germanization responded to the temporary relaxation of Prussian policy by founding the German Eastern Marches Society [*Deutscher Ostmarkenverein*] to lobby for and propagandize settlement efforts.[123] By 1911, it counted roughly 53,000 members in chapters across eastern Prussia.[124] In 1912, the economist Max Sering and the Prussian bureaucrat Friedrich von Schwerin together founded the Society for the Promotion of Internal Colonization [*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation*] to counter what they perceived as the encroaching threat of Polish demographic growth.

These groups and sympathetic political commentators used increasingly racialized

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[112] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 132; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 65–68; Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 142.
[113] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 152.
[114] Ibid., 149.
[115] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 145–46.
[116] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 153.
[117] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:124.
[118] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1140; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 16.
[119] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 23.
[120] Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 287–88.
[121] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 23; Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 132.
[122] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 142; Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 134.
[123] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 15.
[124] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 19.

rhetoric to justify the displacement of Polish speakers. The official organ of the Society for the Promotion of Internal Colonization thus routinely described Poles in the same terms as native societies in Africa, arguing that neither were fit to look after their own affairs and both required the stewardship of a German colonial master.[125] An 1888 article in the influential *Preußische Jahrbücher* similarly claimed that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had failed as a result of Polish political incompetence.[126] What culture and economic prosperity existed in Poland, the author argued, could be traced to the influence of German settlers and Prussian administration after the 18th century.[127] Indeed, nationalist publicists depicted Poles as an almost subhuman population, alien to German culture, irrational, brutish, and prone to violence.[128] Nationalist rhetoric warned that this Polish barbarity might creep westward, corrupting German culture and undermining German national vitality.[129]

But this rhetoric of German colonial superiority was remarkably unstable. The same authors who vehemently emphasized Germany's civilizing role in Poland often admitted that Poles could achieve a similar stage of cultural and economic development as their German neighbors.[130] Indeed, just beneath the arrogant rhetoric of German cultural superiority, proponents of Germanization frequently acknowledged their fear that the Polish nation represented a sophisticated threat to the Kingdom of Prussia and the German Empire. Members of the *Ostmarkenverein* often espoused an exaggerated version of the German national narrative, and were paralyzed by the fear that German national unity was uniquely fragile.[131] By comparison, *Ostmarkenverein* authors warned that Polish nationalists were determined to overthrow Prussian rule, and were actively preparing for an armed revolt to establish an independent Polish state.[132] To their eyes, the Polish nation seemed remarkably organized, "revolutionary", "hostile to the state", and united it its pursuit of Polish independence.[133] When describing the Polish nationalist threat to Prussian integrity, the pretense of Polish incapacity often evaporated. Poland instead became the nation which was preparing a shadow government in preparation for a coup, the nation which had sustained and funded their own cultural institutions for decades, and the nation which had managed to develop a closed communal economy to the exclusion of its German neighbors.[134] For all their rhetoric of Polish inferiority, groups like the *Ostmarkenverein* pushed for the nationalization of the Prussian east because they feared that Polish nationalism would endanger the security of the German Empire.[135]

Prussia's efforts to colonize the *Ostmark* with ethnic German settlers also yielded disappointing results. The Settlement Commission found it increasingly difficult to find qualified German peasants with the resources to establish new farms in the *Ostmark*.[136] Poles quickly developed effective countermeasures to the Settlement Commission. Polish farmers organized agricultural cooperatives to substitute for lacking state support, and developed private financial organizations like the Polish Land Purchase Bank and the Union of Credit Associations to keep land in Polish hands.[137] By 1914, settlement programs had cost the Prussian state nearly one billion marks. For its efforts, it had failed to significantly alter the demographic balance in the *Ostmark* in favor of German speakers.[138] From the establishment of the Settlement Commission in

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[125] Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 74.
[126] Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 76.
[127] Ibid., 77.
[128] Kopp, "Reinventing Poland as German Colonial Territory in the Nineteenth Century: Gustav Freytag's Soll Und Haben as Colonial Novel," 23; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 72–74; Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 86.
[129] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 12.
[130] Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 77.
[131] Paul Dehn, "Nationalismus," *Die Ostmark*, February 1913, 14.
[132] "Die verleumdeten Polen," *Die Ostmark*, September 1913, 79–80.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 80.
[135] See also Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 95.
[136] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 179.
[137] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:130.
[138] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 144.

1886 through 1914, the acreage tilled by Polish landowners had actually grown by 40,000 hectares.[139] Moreover, settlement policies bred discontent among Prussian Poles, and many began to wonder if conciliation with such a hostile state were even possible. After the 1890s, National Democracy began to gain a foothold among the educated youth in parts of the *Ostmark*, challenging the near-monopoly over Polish politics previously enjoyed by conciliationist Polish conservatives. While National Democracy still eschewed calls for a nationalist revolution, its uncompromising oppositional stance, its demand for complete civic equality, and its blatant indulgence in fantasies of a future independent Polish state all frightened observers in Berlin.[140]

Failure again bred radicalization. Nationalist pressure groups and Prussian officials soon lost faith in ethnic German colonization as the primary means of Germanizing the *Ostmark*, and increasingly called upon Berlin to adopt more forceful policies to slow or reverse the growth of the Polish population.[141] Groups like the Pan-German League pressed Berlin to disregard Poles' legal rights in pursuit of more effective Germanization.[142] The Prussian government began to introduce new policies to obstruct Polish settlement and economic development. A 1904 law made building permits in Prussia's eastern provinces subject to denial if they contravened the nationalist goals of the Settlement Commission. This was frequently used to prevent Poles from building housing on parcels of land they already owned.[143] In 1908, the Prussian Landtag passed a law permitting the state to expropriate Polish owned lands to support German settlement efforts.[144]

However, the repeated failures of Germanization also fed a countervailing skepticism of homogenization. Noting that Germanization efforts only seemed to invigorate and popularize Polish opposition, a growing collection of politicians, intellectuals, publicists, and officials argued for more conciliatory policies of ethnic management which accepted Polish national identity as legitimate and compatible with imperial loyalism. The Center Party, the representatives of German Catholics, had opposed Germanization efforts from the beginning, fearing that permitting exceptional cultural legislation could establish a precedent for future anti-Catholic measures.[145] In response to Bismarck's expulsion of non-naturalized Poles and Jews from Prussia in 1885, a coalition of Center, Social Democratic, and Polish Reichstag deputies had officially censured the Prussian government.[146] Left leaning liberals had also begun to oppose the Prussian state's colonization efforts based on its violation of legal equality.[147] The disappointing results of Germanization paired with the mounting opposition of Poles also began to convince liberal and conservative intellectuals of the counter-productivity of homogenization efforts.[148] Hans Delbrück, the editor of the influential *Preußische Jahrbücher*, began to doubt some of Prussia's more coercive anti-Polish policies.[149] Around 1900, he completely abandoned his prior support for Germanization in the *Ostmark*, and launched vocal and persistent criticisms against nationalization.[150] Mounting public opposition restrained Prussian Germanization efforts. Catholic, Social Democratic, and Conservative politicians initially scuttled a proposed Prussian expropriation law. Only extreme pressure from nationalist pressure groups and far right politicians managed to push the 1908 expropriation law through the Prussian Landtag. Even then, Berlin generally avoided enforcing the measure, given its deep unpopularity and dubious constitutionality.[151] The act was applied only once after its passage.[152]

Officials within the Prussian government also began to reconsider the wisdom of an

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[139] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 321.
[140] Ibid., 231–38.
[141] "Der Niedergang des Ansiedlungswerkes," *Die Ostmark*, April 1913, 28.
[142] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 153.
[143] Ibid., 154; Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 168.
[144] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 68–69; Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 168.
[145] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 177; Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 280.
[146] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 134.
[147] Ibid., 156.
[148] Ibid., 157.
[149] Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 77.
[150] Ibid., 95.
[151] Thum, "Imperialists in Panic," 155.
[152] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 19.

antagonistic Polish policy. In the 1890s relations between the German Empire and Russia deteriorated precipitously. Worried that a possible war with Russia would reopen the Polish question, and recognizing that Germanization efforts had only alienated Polish Prussians, Chancellor Leo von Caprivi attempted to repair the Prussian government's relationship with its Polish subjects.[153] Caprivi presided over a general relaxation of Germanization efforts, and pushed through several concessions to Polish national demands. Polish once again became the language of instruction for religious education in schools.[154] The Prussian government also briefly allowed Polish-speakers to participate in state-sponsored efforts to settle small farmers on lands parceled from distressed large estates.[155]

Although Berlin soon returned to a nationalizing agenda in the *Ostmark*, disaffected Prussian officials continued to object to Germanization as ineffective and counterproductive. In 1907, Paul Fuß, a senior Prussian civil-servant and the owner of an estate near Posen vocally criticized Berlin's policy.

> It is worthy of a great nation to ignore petty quarrels and differences of opinion and to permit to everybody their right to hope. With kindness and love one brings various nationalities under one hat, but not with hardness and severity, nor the curtailment of civil rights.[156]

Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, the Chancellor after 1909, had seen the surge in support for National Democracy under the acrimonious policies of his predecessor. He attempted to draw down tensions with Poles and thereby reinforce more conciliatory Polish conservatives.[157] Baron Karl von Puttkamer, a former *Landrat* in Posen and a chamberlain of the Prussian court critiqued Germanization policies yet more forcefully. In 1913, Puttkamer published a memorandum entitled "The Failures of Polish Policy" ["*die Mißerfolge in der Polenpolitik"*], excoriating Prussia's nationalization policies as useless, counterproductive, and immoral.[158] The Polish nation, Puttkamer argued, was civilized, culturally sophisticated, and more than capable of governing a modern state.[159] Since the 18th century partitions, he noted, homogenization efforts had succeeded in neither Russian nor Prussian Poland. "The Poles in Russia," Puttkamer stated bluntly, "have not become Russians, and the Poles in Prussia, no Germans".[160] The Polish nation, he believed, was simply too organized, its culture too robust, and its national identity too firmly rooted to permit linguistic Germanization.

> The number of Poles is a tad too great, the people are a tad too tenacious, to absorb, their past is a tad too glorious to be able to erase it from memory.[161]

Consequently, he believed that Prussian Germanization policies had only sabotaged German-Polish relations and contributed to the rise of a more vehement Polish nationalism. "Whosoever sows hatred, he will also harvest hatred".[162] Puttkamer despised the colonization policy as immoral and unworthy of German civilization. It was "unjust" and "unchristian" for a state to

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[153] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 169.
[154] Ibid., 170.
[155] Ibid., 171. Poles were not permitted to apply to settle on lands purchased by the Royal Prussian Settlement Commission. But their authorization to participate in other state-sponsored settlement efforts undercut the Commission's nationalist efforts.
[156] Paul Reiche, *Deutsche Bücher über Polen: Das Polentum im Spiegel deutscher Wissenschaft* (Breslau: Priebatsch's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1917), 17, 36.
[157] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 196–98.
[158] Karl von Puttkamer, "Die Mißerfolge in der Polenpolitik" (Verlag von Karl Curtius in Berlin, 1913), 74, R43/1397a, BArch.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

abuse "its own Polish citizens" in such a manner.[163] Germanization, and in particular the 1908 expropriation law, discredited the German Empire "in the eyes of all Slavs" and among all of the "civilized states" [*Kulturstaaten*] of the world.[164] When the Russian Empire had violently suppressed the Polish uprising of 1863 by expropriating the property of Poles, Puttkamer noted, Germans had rightly called this "barbarism". But now Prussia, a supposedly "constitutional and civilized state", expropriated the property of completely loyal citizens, simply because of their Polish nationality.[165] Such behavior was simply "unworthy of a great people like the Germans".[166]

Puttkamer further warned that nationalization was a strategically dangerous policy of ethnic management. Polish speakers were concentrated primarily along the eastern frontier of Prussia. "To make them into enemies of the Prussian state, and Germany respectively, is not only ruinous to internal peace," he argued, but also dangerous in the event of war with another great power.[167] Having experienced only hostility and attacks on their language and culture from Berlin, he warned, Poles would have little reason to support the German Empire in an emergency, and good reasons to seek their own independence.

The chamberlain therefore called upon Berlin to abandon nationalization for an explicitly conciliatory policy of ethnic management. Prussia, he argued, should follow Austria-Hungary's lead and focus on making Poles into loyal subjects of the state. "This cannot be achieved with force, with oppression, or least of all with injustice". Rather, Puttkamer argued, Poles "must be governed with love".[168] Berlin's only option was to convince its Polish subjects of the benefits of Prussian rule. He called for the government to dismantle its nationalization policies, purge its local administration of anti-Polish bureaucrats, and replace them with local candidates more sympathetic to Polish culture.[169]

While Prussia's Germanization policies had severely disaffected Polish opinion, they had not yet inflicted irreparable damage to German-Polish relations. Polish Prussians still generally enjoyed the protections of the Prussian constitution and commitment to the rule of law. They could express their political views in a free press and they benefitted Germany's progressive social programs.[170] Despite Berlin's policies, Poles remained predominantly loyal to the Prussian state and the German Empire.[171] Overall, the Polish Fraktion in the Reichstag limited its efforts to rolling back Germanization and achieving social and civil equality for Polish citizens of the German Empire.[172] In response the Caprivi administration's rather limited concessions, the Polish Fraktion had briefly become a consistent and reliable supporter of government policy in the Reichstag.[173] Ferdinand von Radziwiłł, the chairman of Polish Fraktion, committed the party to imperial loyalty. Whether taking an oppositional or conciliatory stance, Polish politicians had generally accepted the integrity of the German Empire. Even National Democratic politicians confined their activities to strictly legal opposition to the policies of the Berlin government.[174]

Polish national politics were also a distinctly regional phenomenon. In Posen and West Prussia, Germanization efforts had led to widespread Polish disillusionment, and vocal opposition to the government in Berlin.[175] Upper Silesia, however, saw far less rigid political mobilization along national lines.[176] Here a common Roman Catholic identity and shared church

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[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Martin Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich: Ehrenwirth, 1963), 133.
[171] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:136.
[172] Ibid., 2:136–37.
[173] Ibid., 2:137.
[174] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 234.
[175] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1139.
[176] Ibid., 1141; James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008).

institutions undermined national boundaries.[177] German language fluency was often accepted as a pragmatic tool for social advancement, and bilingualism was common.[178] Polish speakers in Masuria, the northeastern reach of East Prussia, were often described as "Polish-speaking Germans".[179] Many were Protestants and the region had generally welcomed the introduction of German-language education.[180] Polish nationalist political agitation had fallen flat in this region, and efforts to establish lending libraries and political organizations had met with little interest. *Mazur*, the region's only Polish nationalist newspaper, had only 400 paying subscribers.[181]

When war broke out in 1914, therefore, Germans were divided over how Berlin should manage Prussia's significant Polish speaking minority. Most observers agreed that, after more than four decades, linguistic Germanization had yielded shabby results and that Germany could not expect Polish-speakers to assimilate in any significant numbers. But groups drew different conclusions from this failure. Still believing that ethnic heterogeneity inherently destabilized the German Empire, and that Poles would eventually challenge Prussia for control of the *Ostmark*, groups like the *Ostmarkenverein* and nationalist Prussian officials sought to demographically reengineer eastern Prussia. If Poles would not become Germans, these groups concluded, they would need to be made numerically insignificant and unable to challenge German rule. Proponents of nationalization pressed Berlin to support more aggressive settlement programs, to restrict Polish construction, and to expropriate Polish landowners. The most radical voices in the Pan-German League even called for the expulsion of Polish-speaking residents from Prussia.[182]

But calls for more aggressive nationalization were met by a growing chorus of politicians, intellectuals, and disaffected Prussian officials who considered nationalization counterproductive. They saw homogenization policies as futile and expensive, and noted that they seemed only to feed the more anti-Prussian wing of the Polish national movement. Believing that Polish national identity could coexist with loyalty to both the Kingdom of Prussia and the German Empire, these voices called on Berlin to roll back its Germanization efforts, and pursue a comprehensive reconciliation between Germans and Poles. In exchange for Berlin's recognition of Polish linguistic and cultural rights, they hoped that Poles would respect Prussia's continued territorial integrity and sovereignty in the *Ostmark*.

This debate remained unresolved as German army units marched to war in 1914. At stake was the fundamental question of how to most effectively manage ethnic diversity to achieve lasting imperial security. Proponents of conciliation and supporters of nationalization were often sharply divided. Puttkamer's 1913 memorandum described Germanization as counterproductive, "unchristian", and "unworthy" of German national culture. One Chancellery official reading the memorandum apparently though Puttkamer a fool, and scribbled an irritated Latin note in the margin: "*Quem deus vult perdere, dementat!"* – "Whom God would destroy, he makes mad!".[183] War only made this debate more urgent. Control over Congress Poland would greatly fortify Germany's vulnerable eastern border with Russia if Berlin could politically stabilize the region. The prospect of projecting German influence into Congress Poland would force German policy-makers to resolve this basic question of ethnic management.

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[177] Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole*.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1141.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Shelley Baranowski, "Against 'Human Diversity as Such': Lebensraum and Genocide in the Third Reich," in *German Colonialism, Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 53–54.
[183] von Puttkamer, "Die Mißerfolge in der Polenpolitik," 74.

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Germany's Public Debate over Managing Polish Space in WWI

By the summer of 1914, Germans had judged Berlin's efforts to homogenize Prussia's population ineffective. It was apparent that Prussian citizens were not abandoning the Polish language in large numbers, and that Germanization had proven too halting, expensive, and legally constricted to meaningfully impact the ethnic composition of the region. Germans had drawn disparate lessons from this failure. Nationalist groups like the Pan-German League and the *Ostmarkenverein*, believed national identity determined political loyalty, and therefore saw Prussia's Polish population as an inherent threat. Failure only steeled their resolve and generated more radical proposals for homogenizing the region. Before the war, some had called for more aggressive German colonization, or even for the expulsion of Polish Prussians. Conversely, a growing constituency recommended that Berlin seek rapprochement with its Polish-speaking citizens by dismantling Prussia's anti-Polish legislation. Even Prussian bureaucrats had begun to wonder whether a German-Polish reconciliation might better serve imperial interests.

The outbreak of war in Europe raised the stakes of Polish loyalty. Many Germans initially feared that Prussia's sizeable Polish population might sabotage the war effort, in order to restore Poland as an independent state with the Entente's assistance. In the first weeks of August the Grand Prince of the Russian Empire called Poles to rally behind the Tsar, promising in return to reunite Polish lands and reform Poland's relationship with the rest of the Russian Empire.[1] Comparable German and Austro-Hungarian overtures quickly followed. Berlin, Petrograd, and Vienna each attempted to weaponize their foe's domestic Polish population as a fifth column.

Politicians, intellectuals, and elites from across the political spectrum simultaneously pondered how to fortify the German Empire's strategic position. To contemporaries, Germany seemed trapped in a *Mittellage* on the European continent, a "central position, open on three fronts to attack", and surrounded by powerful rivals.[2] Of these rivals, German observers often perceived the Russian Empire as the most daunting and immediate strategic threat to the German Empire. Russia dwarfed Germany, but its relative economic weakness and lack of transportation infrastructure had made it seem rather innocuous. German observers were therefore deeply concerned by Russia's seemingly rapid industrialization beginning in the mid-1890s.[3] In 1913, St. Petersburg had initiated a series of military reforms to increase the size and mobility of the army. The Great Army Program aimed to expand the peacetime Russian army to 2.2 million soldiers over several years, while simultaneously constructing new railway lines to speed mobilization of further reserves.[4] Russia's growing military capability raised alarm in Germany, where observers wrote obsessively about the threat posed by the expansion and modernization of Russia's army.[5]

German political observers had long feared Russia's intentions. In the years before 1914, papers across the political spectrum had warned readers that Russia was preparing for war.[6] German analysts worried that Russia's desire to secure its export routes from Black Sea ports into the Mediterranean would push it into conflict with the Ottoman Empire and Austria-

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[1] Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 23.

[2] Ernst Jäckh, "Grundlagen deutscher Weltpolitik," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 3 (April 19, 1914): 65.

[3] Paul Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift: Zwei Menschenalter erlebter Weltgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hans Dulk, 1953), 18.

[4] Jesse Kauffman, "The Colonial U-Turn: Why Poland Is Not Germany's India," in *Cultural Landscapes: Transatlantische Perspektiven Auf Wirkungen Und Auswirkungen Deutscher Kultur Und Geschichte Im Östlichen Europa*, ed. Andrew Demshuk and Tobias Weger (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015), 56.

[5] Axel Schmidt, "Russlands Friedenspolitik," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (June 6, 1914): 229; Paul Rohrbach, "Zur russischen Kriegsgefahr," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (June 13, 1914): 278–84; Julius Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," in *An den Grenzen Russland; Elf Abhandlungen aus der Sammlung "Der Weltkrieg,"* ed. Sekretariat Sozialer Studentenarbeit (München-Gladbach: Volksvereins-Verlag GmbH., 1916), 68.

[6] Troy Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War" (University of California at Berkeley, 1994), 248–82.

Hungary for control of the Balkans.[7] Some had feared that fantasies of reclaiming Constantinople for the Orthodox Church would further tempt St. Petersburg to lead a new popular crusade.[8] Others predicted that influential Pan-Slavic nationalists would press for war to "reduce the Austro-Hungarian Empire to rubble" and thereby 'liberate' South-Slavs.[9] Many German observers had therefore concluded years before 1914 that Russian expansionism represented the foremost threat to German security.[10] When war did break out, writers warned that a victorious Petrograd would annex East and West Prussia, Silesia, and Posen.[11] Even if Germany defeated Russia in the current war, many believed that these intractable strategic conflicts would remain, and would make renewed conflict with Russia all but inevitable.

The wartime attentions of the German public therefore focused quickly on Germany's frontier with Russia. The border stretched from Nimmersatt (Nemirseta) on the Baltic coast, to Myslowitz (Mysłowice) in Upper Silesia, over a 1,200 km long S-curve. Its shear size required substantial military deployments to defend from invasion. Geographers agreed that it offered few natural obstacles to shield defenders from a Russian advance. Its flat terrain and the many rivers flowing northward into East and West Prussia, were thought conducive to Russian offensive operations.[12] Writers described Congress Poland as a Russian "wedge" or spearhead, stabbing into Germany and "facilitating" Russian attacks into the interior. Germans widely agreed that the frontier was simply indefensible.[13] Worse yet, Russia bordered some of Germany's most important regions. Upper Silesia, a vital center of heavy industry, directly abutted the Russian border in the south. German writers warned that artillery stationed in Congress Poland could shell Silesia's vital Coal-beds, Iron and Zinc works, coking plants, and chemical refineries within the first hour a future conflict, wrecking Germany's war economy.[14] A skillful Russian attack could easily overrun Posen and Silesia.[15] At its western-most point, the frontier lay only 250 km from the Berlin or, as one observer wrote, at the very "gates of the imperial capital".[16]

After the summer of 1915, Germans felt confident that they would be able to alter their eastern frontier. In May 1915, General August von Mackensen had broken through Russian lines on the Gorlice-Tarnów front, threatening the Russian southern flank. A limited Russian withdrawal quickly snowballed into a panicked rout eastward before a general German advance. By the time weather halted German units in October, the Central Powers had seized control of Congress Poland, Lithuania, and parts of White Ruthenia. Congress Poland was split between an Austro-Hungarian occupation regime, the Government General of Lublin, concentrated in the Southeast, and the much larger German occupation, the Government General of Warsaw. The Kaiser installed decorated Prussian General Hans Hartwig von Beseler as Governor General of German-occupied Poland. Other captured territory remained under the direct administration of Hindenburg's Supreme Command on the Eastern Front, *Oberbefehlshaber Ost* or Ober Ost.[17]

With Congress Poland in the hands of the Central Powers, Germans confronted a security paradox. Most agreed that the German Empire's security in the East required seizing Congress Poland. Control of the region would drastically shorten Germany's eastern border, while removing a threatening salient from Russia's control. However, any gain in territory also required managing a potentially hostile Polish population. Direct annexation of all, or even part,

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[7] Axel Schmidt, "Rußlands Endziel," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (n.d.): 121; Paul Rohrbach, *Der Krieg und die deutsche Politik* (Dresden: Verlag "Das grössere Deutschland," 1914), 54.
[8] Schmidt, "Rußlands Endziel," 121.
[9] Rohrbach, "Zur russischen Kriegsgefahr," 283.
[10] Paul Rohrbach, "Die russische Gefahr," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 3 (April 19, 1914): 57.
[11] Paul Rohrbach, "Kriegspolitische Ausrichtung," *Deutsche Politik*, April 7, 1916, 667.
[12] Josef Partsch, "Deutschlands Ostgrenze," *Zeitschrift für Politik* 8 (1916): 16–17, 21.
[13] Gustav von Schmoller, "Deutsche und Polen," *Polnische Blätter* 1, no. 3 (October 20, 1915): 78.
[14] Alfred Hillebrandt and Johannes Nikel, "Memorandum Submitted by Faculty of the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office," November 1915, 127, R 21575, PA AA.
[15] Georg Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1917), 13.
[16] Ibid., 12–13; Max Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 739, 740. DSP 12-13. DH 1914, 739, 740.
[17] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21.

of Congress Poland promised to create a larger Polish minority in Germany. Moreover, expansion threatened to incense and mobilize Polish nationalists, eroding political stability in both Prussia and the newly occupied territories. Observers worried that resident Poles might resist German rule, or collude with Russia in future conflicts.

German thinkers scrambled to resolve this paradox. They developed two broad paradigms for managing ethnic diversity. Supporters of pre-war Germanization tended to favor stabilization via autocratic rule and national homogenization. They considered any Polish minority in German territory potentially subversive and threatening. For them, the German Empire could only secure this territory through direct annexation and determined Germanization. Polish national culture in annexed territories would be a temporary or repressed phenomenon, to be eliminated through some mixture of linguistic Germanization, German colonization, and deportation of ethnic Poles.

Yet from 1914 through 1916, these proposals faced robust and influential competition from Germans who advocated multinational strategies for extending German control over Poland. A diverse array of German publicists, intellectuals, and politicians promoted multinational imperialism during the war. The most prominent supporters of this paradigm were concentrated among left liberals, Roman Catholics, and moderate conservatives. Though proponents varied widely in their ideological and political commitments, they were united by a set of shared assumptions about how to govern ethnically diverse space. Multinationalists did not equate national identity with political loyalty, and they denied that Polish national culture was inherently hostile to German imperial interests. Instead they argued either that Polish national interests were already pro-German, or that the Polish sentiment could be effectively manipulated by Berlin. Multinational imperialists vocally opposed both Germanizing occupied Poland and expunging Polish culture. Rather, they argued that Polish nationals would loyally and enthusiastically collaborate with the German Empire to achieve mutual security, if they were guaranteed political and cultural autonomy. Multinationalists thus proposed carving Congress Poland from the Russian Empire and constructing an autonomous Polish state as part of a federally organized German imperial structure. Ambitious versions favored incorporating Poland into a Central European confederation under German leadership. Others argued that Germany should forge a new Kingdom of Poland, autonomous in most political and cultural matters, but subject to German suzerainty in foreign policy and wartime military command. The most optimistic simply proposed incorporating part or all of Congress Poland as a new federal kingdom of the German Empire. All such proposals shared three assumptions about Poland's future: Poland would assume responsibility for its own cultural institutions and domestic affairs; Warsaw would maintain a peacetime military led by Polish officers; and Berlin would coordinate Poland's foreign policy, tariffs, and lead its army in times of war. This chapter will examine the assumptions of multinational imperialism and its most important public supporters. I will argue that between 1914-1916, large and influential sectors of the German public sphere preferred imperial strategies that relied on national autonomy and multinational collaboration over alternative, more repressive, models of ethnic management.

Historians have generally downplayed or overlooked multinational imperialism when studying public discussions of war aims in Germany. Fritz Fischer and Imanuel Geiss focused on proving that political and intellectual elites broadly favored establishing Germany's hegemony over continental Europe.[18] They both assumed the self-determining nation-state as the legitimate norm of political organization. They therefore tended to regard any exercise of imperial influence as almost equally criminal, and showed little interest in disentangling Germany's intense public debates about the methods by which Berlin was to manage an expanded imperial realm. Geiss frequently equated any proposals for annexations in Congress Poland with radical schemes for securing this space, assuming that most Germans who favored annexation also tacitly supported aggressive Germanization, and even the expulsion of resident Poles.[19] Both Fischer and Geiss

[18] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967); Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 5.

[19] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 46.

routinely conflated imperial projects which were similar in territorial scope, but which vastly differed in their mechanisms and assumptions of rule.[20]

In recent decades, historiographical focus has shifted to examine how Germans conceived of ruling over ethnically diverse populations. Studies of the connections between European colonialism and German continental imperialism have dominated this literature, with many historians arguing that 19th century colonial practices and ideologies shaped German designs on Eastern Europe. Several scholars have argued that Germany's experiences in governing a colonial empire in Africa and Asia conditioned German intellectuals and publicists to understand ethnic homogenization and racial mastery as the only basis for stable control over imperial space.[21] Another growing body of historians has contended that most German publicists and intellectuals had already begun to view Poles as primitive, uncultured, and incompetent, and had therefore concluded that Poland would be appropriate space for colonization and Germanization.[22] Historians have argued that by 1914 this "discursive colonization had become the dominant lens through which Germans understood Poland.[23] They portray Wilhelmine political discourse as having already developed a pervasive and violent anti-Slavism, and suggest that Germans were mostly willing to countenance radical methods of ruling Poland, including colonization and mass resettlement, to fulfill Germany's "colonial mission" in the east.[24]

Germany's wartime occupation of the Baltics has become the paramount example for how perception of Eastern Europeans as colonial subjects enlisted public support for coercive strategies of ethnic management. Vejas Liulevicius has argued that the German public broadly understood the war in Russia, and the occupation of *OberOst*, as a grand struggle between German *Kultur* and Eastern European barbarism, or *Unkultur*.[25] Germans, he argues, perceived the western reaches of the Russian Empire as chaotic and undeveloped, its native populations primitive and feckless.[26] Germans' sense of their own mission to civilize this barbaric landscape strongly influenced the public war aims debate, disposing Germans towards homogenizing and

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[20] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 160–63.

[21] Dennis Sweeney, "Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 302–19; Bradley Naranch, "'Colonized Body,' 'Oriental Machine': Debating Race, Railroads, and the Politics of Reconstruction in Germany and East Africa, 1906-1910," *Central European History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 306.

[22] Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 6–19, 16–17; Kristin Kopp, "Arguing the Case for a Colonial Poland," in *German Colonialism : Race, the Holocaust and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 147; Robert L Nelson, "Colonialism in Europe? The Case Against Salt Water," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5; Robert L Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 65, 74–80; Philipp Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte: Polen, slawophone Minderheiten und das Kaiserreich als kontinentales Empire," in *Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006), 132–34; Sebastian Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany: Culture Wars, Germanification of the Soil, and the Global Market Imaginary," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 283–84; David Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Eine Skizze," in *Das Kaiserreich Transnational: Deutschland in Der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006), 323.

[23] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 23, 57–95; Sönke Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik: Das Beispiel der 'Preußischen Jahrbücher' (1886-1914)," in *Cultural Landscapes: Transatlantische Perspektiven auf Wirkungen und Auswirkungen deutscher Kultur und Geschichte im östlichen Europa*, ed. Andrew Demshuk and Tobias Weger (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015), 71–73; Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 74.

[24] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East, 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 343; Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany," 287–88; Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 65, 81, 85–86; Robert L Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space: Forced Population Transfer Fantasies during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014), 113–14; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 125.

[25] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 29.

[26] Ibid., 22.

colonial methods of rule in *OberOst*.[27]

This narrative of German history centered on the "discursive colonization" of the East has framed German perceptions, experiences, and stereotypes of Eastern European peoples as undifferentiated or interchangeable. German perceptions of Poles are regularly conflated, in this literature, with German ideas about Balts or even Russians. All are portrayed as part of a uniform, colonial, "mindscape of the East".[28] In contrast, this chapter will demonstrate that both multinationalists and nationalists carefully differentiated between Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, White Ruthenians, and Russians, and that their judgment of the political sophistication of each group greatly impacted what methods of ethnic management they deemed appropriate for securing German rule locally.

More broadly, the literature on German war aims discourse has tended to dramatically overstate public support for nationalizing models of ethnic management, and minimize Germans' support for multinational imperialism. While some historians have acknowledged the circulation of alternative models of ethnic management in the German public, many have summarily dismissed their importance. Geiss in particular argued that alternatives models of ethnic management were a "negligible quantity", never seriously considered by the German public and utterly un-influential when compared with nationalizing strategies of ruling Polish space.[29] The recent spate of literature on colonial inspirations for German imperialism in Eastern Europe has only reinforced this assessment by arguing that colonialism and discursive colonization basically defined the parameters of Germany's public debate over war aims in WWI.[30] Specifically, historians have disregarded alternative strategies of ethnic management in wartime discourse, portraying them as a fleeting and moribund deviation from a centuries-long German colonial "myth" of the East. Unmoored from a longer German national discourse, any competition to this firmly-anchored paradigm was doomed to drift and founder.[31]

The emerging colonial narrative has also reinforced the propensity to interpret any desire to extend German influence eastward as a manifestation of a colonial mindset or attitudes of racial superiority.[32] Central Europe [*Mitteleuropa*] has been deemed "Germany's true counterpart to India or Algeria", if only conceptually.[33] Broader historical treatments regularly conflate vastly different imperial programs, generally ascribing the methods of more intrusive forms of ethnic management to their less coercive competitors. Satellite States are now equated with annexations as components in a WWI German "process of colonizing the East".[34] Virulent critics of the Pan-German league like Paul Rohrbach are regularly lumped in with "other prominent members of the Pan-German League" when discussing war aims debates.[35] Conversely, radical Pan-Germans like Friedrich von Schwerin are routinely portrayed as representing virtually the whole panacea of German war aims discourse, which is taken to broadly favor the installation of racial hierarchy, *großdeutsch* or *gesamtdeutsch* unification, and colonial repression.[36]

The following chapter calls for a renovation in how the German public's war aims debate in WWI is understood. It will parse German imperial projects, not according to the territorial scale of their ambitions, but according to how Germans attempted to establish a durable system of imperial influence in Polish space. That is, it focuses on how they attempted to manage ethnically diverse space. Accordingly, it frames the war aims debate as a contest between supporters of nationalizing and multinational imperialism, rather than between annexationists

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[27] Ibid., 29, 165.
[28] Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*.
[29] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 24–27, 70.
[30] Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*, 2–7.
[31] Ibid., 98–120; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 208.
[32] Jesse Kauffman, Winson Chu, and Michael Meng, "A Sonderweg through Eastern Europe? The Varieties of German Rule in Poland during the Two World Wars," *German History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 318–44.
[33] Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich Transnational," 322.
[34] Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58.
[35] Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 93.
[36] Jones, "The German Empire," 58–59.

and proponents of a negotiated peace. Germany's war on the Eastern front was accompanied by an acrimonious conflict between German supporters of two distinct concepts of ethnic management. From 1914 to 1916, multinational imperialism offered a persuasive alternative to nationalizing projects, and was perhaps more influential within the German public's debate over war aims in Poland. Closely examining the discourse of multinational imperialism, and enumerating its public supporters, will also establish a necessary baseline for examining how and why wartime experiences altered German preferences for these strategies of ethnic management.

Nationalizing Imperialism as a Model for Establishing Control over Polish Space

Nationalizing imperialists proposed to stabilize imperial expansion in ethnically Polish space by prophylactically suppressing potential nationalist subversion. This paradigm of ethnic management largely drew support from the political right, especially from among National Liberals and Conservatives.[37] Public backing came largely from groups which had strongly favored aggressive Germanization in Prussia before the war. The *Ostmarkenverein*, the Pan-German League, and the Society for the Promotion of Internal Colonization all actively propagated nationalizing imperial projects in brochures, articles, books, and memoranda written for both the educated public and the government.[38] Given the dismal record of Prussia's Germanization efforts since the 1870s, these Nationalist thinkers concluded that any attempt to "coercively Germanize" Poles would be idiocy.[39] Those rare nationalists who entertained the possibility of linguistic Germanization spoke in scales of centuries, not decades. Instead nationalizing imperialists produced three new models for securing territory in Congress Poland and managing resident Poles.

The most reserved proposed seizing part or all of Congress Poland and installing an autocratic German administration to rule over Poles as a legally subordinate "subject" people. Proponents aimed to resolve the threat of subversion or revolt through stifling repression, and by insulating regional levers of power from Polish influence. Proposals envisioned a permanent military occupation establishing Berlin's absolute administrative command over this territory.[40] Supporters typically called for a German regent, or "*Statthalter*", to preside over the new province.[41] Minimally, Berlin would invasively police the region, preventing the organization of paramilitary resistance or the accumulation of political influence in unreliable Polish hands. Poles were to be excluded from all positions of responsibility within this "reservation", their political power limited to an "expanded municipal self-administration".[42] New Polish subjects were to vote in neither the Prussian Landtag nor the Reichstag, as this might empower a legislative fifth column of Poles.[43] Importantly, proponents sought to militarily neutralize the Polish population, either by allowing only minimal conscription of Polish subjects into the Prussian army, or by avoiding the creation of any sort of Polish military.[44] Erecting a special administration in the new provinces, outside of the constitutional structure of Prussia or the German Empire, would afford Berlin legal flexibility to further strip defiant Polish subjects of their rights or property. Optimistic proponents hoped that legal discrimination against Poles would encourage the population to adopt German cultural and linguistic norms. The scale of this annexed Polish "reservation" differed according to each proposal, but supporters usually staked out claims to considerable swathes of territory.[45]

Friedrich Lezius, a theological professor teaching at the University of Königsberg,

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[37] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 66.
[38] Ibid., 47, 66.
[39] Friedrich Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," January 1916, 161–68, R1501/119780, BArch.
[40] Faust, "Die polnische Gefahr.," 1915, 168–74, R 21574, PA AA; Löwenfeld, "Die Abrechnung mit Russland," October 1915, 261, R 21574, PA AA.
[41] "'Deutschlands Ostgrenze jetzt und in Zukunft', Memoradum circulated in the Foreign Office," October 16, 1915, 305–6, R 21574, PA AA.
[42] Otto Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," December 31, 1914, 30, R 21574, PA AA.
[43] "Deutschlands Ostgrenze jetzt und in Zukunft," 301.
[44] Löwenfeld, "Die Abrechnung mit Russland," 264.
[45] Ibid., 259.

proposed this model of ethnic management to the Imperial Ministry of the Interior in 1916.[46] Lezius recommended that Germany administer a large partition of Congress Poland as a military colony, in which the German army would rule over a "subjugated province" with "dictatorial authority".[47] Poles might be permitted to administer some of their own cultural affairs within this "reservation" [*Reservatgebiet*], so long as their activity did not challenge Berlin's absolute authority. However, Lezius imagined that any political influence held by Poles would be minimal, and shrinking.[48] A military governor would command the province, and German would be the language of authority.[49] A new legal system would segregate ethnic Polish "subjects" and regular citizens of the German Empire, and systematically disadvantage the former. German citizens would be permitted to own property and enjoy full economic rights in Polish territory, but Polish subjects would have no economic rights in Germany.[50] Lezius imagined that this legal disability would create a one-way colonization valve, allowing the unlimited settlement and accumulation of wealth by Germans in the "reservation", while prohibiting the infiltration of Polish settlers into the empire. Additionally, Lezius insisted that Poles would naturally strive to Germanize themselves to obtain the legal advantages of German citizenship. Loyal Polish subjects, he imagined, might eventually earn German citizenship through mastery of the German language and voluntary service in the German Army. In a century or so, if enough Germans settled in the reservation, and enough Poles adopted German culture, Lezius allowed that Berlin might restructure this special administrative territory as a regular province of Prussia.[51]

A more aggressive model focused on demographically reengineering annexed territories. Supporters like Reinhold Seeberg, a professor of theology at the University of Berlin, the historian Otto Hoetzsch, and other *Ostmarkenverein* authors argued that only a Germanized border-strip would establish a "strong border-wall" against the Russian "military threat", where Berlin wouldn't need to fear disruption or sabotage by Polish nationalists.[52] Proponents therefore called upon Berlin to annex a swathe of territory along Germany's eastern frontier, and aggressively colonize the region, swamping the Polish-speaking population with new German-speaking settlers. Proponents also hoped that colonization of this border-strip would isolate ethnic Poles in Prussia. Starved of new immigrants from the east and cut off from the larger Polish community, nationalists believed that the border-strip would accelerate Germanization. Consequently, advocates always insisted that the Prussian government maintain its current educational and settlement policies.[53]

Nationalists who favored the colonization of an annexed border-strip considered the reduction of the ethnic Polish community absolutely necessary for Berlin's durable rule over new territory. Consequently, they tended to limit the geographic scale of their proposals to a discrete "border-strip", like the Narew-Bug-Vistula line, that could be conceivably Germanized through colonization.[54] At the apex of German military success in the summer of 1915, advocates of Germanizing Polish space were willing to dramatically expand the scope of proposed annexations. However, they were not willing to modify the nature of ethnic management they envisioned for these territories. Even as the numbers of potentially affected Poles ballooned, the *Ostmarkenverein* and like-minded nationalists continued to insist that Berlin demographically reengineer annexations into ethnic German space. On the 17 August 1915, less that two weeks after German units had seized Warsaw, the *Ostmarkenverein* delivered a new memorandum to the Foreign Office, in which Dietrich Schäfer revised the *Ostmarkenverein's* war aims in

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[46] Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," 161; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 51.
[47] Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," 161–69.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Reinhold Seeberg, "Memorandum on War Aims," August 6, 1915, 197, R1501/119779, BArch.
[53] Dietrich Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," August 1915, 111, R 21574, PA AA; Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," September 15, 1915, 239, 244, R 21574, PA AA.
[54] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 20; Brukhusen, "Kriegs- und Friedenziele," September 17, 1915, 194, R 21574, PA AA.

Poland.[55] With the conquest of all of Congress Poland, Schäfer now articulated three German priorities for the region. First, he still proposed to secure Germany's vulnerable eastern border by annexing and Germanizing a strip of Polish territory adjacent to Prussia. A temporary military dictatorship, unrestricted by the Prussian constitution, would secure this "defensive belt" through aggressive colonization or population exchanges.[56]

Secondly, recognizing that Berlin couldn't realistically hope to homogenize the whole region, Schäfer imagined establishing a politically and militarily neutralized Polish reservation from the remaining territory of Congress Poland.[57] Surrounded on three sides by Germany, it would be militarily and economically crippled, and absolutely dependent on Berlin's forbearance. Schäfer suggested that Poles might be granted some measure of responsibility for their own affairs, but always under the careful surveillance of Berlin. The Polish reservation would not be permitted to pursue its own foreign policy.[58]

Finally, in order to complete the isolation of this Polish "island", Schäfer demanded a new scythe of annexations hooking downward from Allenstein (Olsztyn) to the East of Congress Poland, including the provinces of Kovno, Vilna, Suwałki, Grodno, and Minsk.[59] Like the original border-strip, a special German military administration would govern these territories, and oversee their gradual colonization and Germanization.[60] Their residents would not enjoy the protections of the imperial constitution or legal equality with German citizens.[61] Schäfer believed this second border-strip would fulfill two functions. First, it would act as a "hindrance" for Poland's historic "drive to rule" [*Herrschaftsdrange*] territories in White Ruthenia, Ukraine, and Lithuania, and permanently consign rump Poland to strategic impotence.[62] Simultaneously, Schäfer hoped to "spatially separate Russians and Poles from one another", to prevent Russia from sponsoring Polish irredentist organizations, or providing rapid military aid to the rump Polish state if it revolted against its German master.[63] In Schäfer's view, Berlin could only dissuade resistance from Polish nationalism through a mixture of aggressive colonization and the threat of overwhelming military force.

A third paradigm of ethnic management sought to totally secure annexed territory through the systematic expulsion of resident Poles further eastward. Friedrich von Schwerin, the *Regierungspräsident* of Frankfurt an der Oder, supported ethnic cleansing as a model of imperial management in two detailed memoranda submitted to the Chancellery in 1915.[64] The executive committee of the Pan-German League also infamously sent a memorandum under Heinrich Claß's signature to the government in August 1914, recommending the annexation of a large strip of Polish territory along the Prussian border, secured by the immediate expulsion of its Jewish and Polish-speaking residents.[65] As yet unprotected through the Prussian constitution, expulsion eastward would be compulsory for Poles in the border-strip, but Pan-Germans hoped the purge would induce a voluntary exodus of Polish citizens from Prussia.[66] Pan-Germans argued that this "ethnic realocation of land" [*völkischer Flurbereinigung*], would finally eliminate the threat of a Polish fifth column, and considered it the top priority for obtaining German security in the East.[67]

While forcible expulsion offered the attraction of finality, few nationalists overtly

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[55] Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 102–3.
[56] Ibid., 105, 112.
[57] Ibid., 111.
[58] Ibid., 111–12.
[59] Ibid., 105–7.
[60] Ibid., 110–13.
[61] Ibid., 110.
[62] Ibid., 109.
[63] Ibid., 108.
[64] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 116.
[65] Ibid., 106–8; Werner Conze, "Nationalstaat oder Mitteleuropa: Die Deutsches Reichs und die Nationalitätenfragen Ostmitteleuropas im ersten Weltkrieg," in *Deutschland und Europa. historische Studien zur Völker- und Staatenordnung des Abendlandes* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1951), 208; Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 125.
[66] Conze, "Nationalstaat oder Mitteleuropa," 209.
[67] Ibid., 208–9.c

supported ethnic cleansing in the early years of the war.[68] Even many leaders of the *Ostmarkenverein* dismissed this idea, either because they considered it impractical, or because they recoiled at the suggestion of dragooning large civilian populations from their homes. Schäfer considered ethnic cleansing impractical and destabilizing.[69] Otto Hoetzsch worried that the violence required to drive Polish civilians from their homes would be politically unsustainable.[70] In December 1914 he cautioned Berlin that expulsions or "population exchanges" were neither "possible" nor even "possible to discuss in seriousness".[71]

German nationalists therefore contemplated three models for managing Polish space within an expanded German Empire: autocratic administration, colonization, and ethnic cleansing. Actual proposals defied this neat taxonomy. Most nationalizing imperialists borrowed aspects from each of these models. Otto Hoetzsch, for instance, believed that the successful colonization of the proposed border-strip required placing this region under a "type of colonial administration", headed by "resident German nobility".[72] Friedrich Lezius likewise paired his support for governing annexations through "dictatorial authority" with a call to colonize the region with German settlers.[73] He also recommended that Berlin unilaterally expropriate Polish estates in eastern Prussia and settle them with ethnic Germans, hoping that this would gradually drive Polish Prussians into the new "reservation".[74]

The frequent cross-pollination of these paradigms resulted from nationalists' shared understanding of how national identity affected political loyalty. Nationalists judged Polish national identity to be fundamentally incompatible with loyalty to the German Empire. They believed that Polish nationals longed for the restoration of an independent Polish state, one which would include territories annexed by Prussia after 1772 and even regions with large Polish-speaking populations. Consequently, they perceived Polish culture as an intrinsic danger to German imperial space, which threatened to foster political obstructionism, collaboration with foreign powers, or even revolt. Of course other ambitions and ideological frameworks informed nationalist projects. However, this understanding of national identity as both immutable and rigidly linked to political loyalty determined their prescriptions for ethnic management.

Many nationalizing imperialists also dreamed of expanding Germany's agricultural and industrial resources through Polish annexations. Industrial interest groups demanded territory adjacent to Upper Silesia, both to secure the valuable Dąbrowa coal seams, and to create a buffer to protect the valuable industrial center.[75] More generally, annexationists hungered for farmland in Eastern Europe.[76] The imposition of the British blockade in 1914 had convinced Germans that the empire's dependence on imported foodstuffs constituted a fatal weakness. Annexationists thus hoped to secure a measure of nutritional autarky for the German Empire by acquiring new fertile lands in the East.[77] Advocates noted that new "settlement-land" in Poland might also entice potential German emigrants to remain in the empire.[78] Indeed, many hoped that the economic opportunities provided by territorial expansion would stoke the demographic growth of the German nation.

While the expansion of agricultural resources was a common concern, it was not a universal priority for nationalizing imperialists. Some nationalists even doubted the importance of these objectives. Otto Hoetzsch, for instance, admitted that the German nation didn't really

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[68] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 46.. Geiss infers that a significantly larger number of German nationalists actually tacitly supported the expulsion of Poles from annexed territories. Given the vocal opposition of several prominent colonial annexationists, this conclusion seems dubious.
[69] Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 109.
[70] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 20.
[71] Otto Hoetzsch, "Gedanken über die politischen Ziele des Krieges," December 1914, 214–33, R43/2476, BArch.
[72] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 49.
[73] Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," 161–69.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 44–46.
[76] Ibid., 44.
[77] Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," 239; Dietrich Schäfer, "Deutschland und der Osten," *Die Ostmark*, January 1915, 9.
[78] Seeberg, "Memorandum on War Aims," 197; Hoetzsch, "Gedanken über die politischen Ziele des Krieges," 222.

require any new territory in the East for settlement purposes. The German Empire was, after all, a net importer of labor.[79] He correctly noted that Congress Poland was already densely populated, and that annexations were unlikely to catalyze a rapid expansion of the German population.[80] Hoetzsch unenthusiastically described a colonized border-strip as a burdensome strategic necessity.[81] Proponents of autocratic German rule over a Polish territory were generally even more skeptical of agrarian or *völkisch* objectives. Many doubted the appropriateness of Congress Poland for German settlement, given that the land was "already completely occupied" by Poles.[82] In light of the region's population density, they doubted that settlement could actually create a significant German national presence in the seized territory, and considered the effort to dilute Polish national influence wasted.[83] They also portrayed the annexation of these territories as a regrettable necessity, to be pursued exclusively for the sake of military security.[84]

The desire for agricultural resources did not determine the nature of German rule in Poland. Access to food supplies could be pursued through a number of political means, many of which did not require annexations, autocratic rule, colonization, or ethnic cleansing of Polish territory. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, many thinkers who favored the fortification of Germany's food supply chain, and even supported the expansion of German settlement in Eastern Europe, also vehemently rejected these paradigms for managing Polish space.

Of course, nationalizing imperialists used rhetoric of Polish racial or cultural inferiority to justify territorial expansion into Congress Poland. Members of the *Ostmarkenverein* and other nationalist authors continued to portray Poles as culturally inferior, unable to organize their own affairs, and in need of German rule as a civilizing influence. If Germans did not forcefully push their culture eastward, they still warned that Polish barbarity might diffuse into Prussia, infecting German communities with subversive Polish elements.[85] Nationalist observers perceived Congress Poland as a mirror image of the national situation in in Prussia, a region where Poles were overwhelming traditional German national outposts rather than being held at bay by settlement and educational initiatives. They anxiously relayed reports from the *Deutsche Post* in Łódź, which told of the "strong influence of the Polish intelligentsia" and the Polonization of German industrialists and workers living in the city.[86] Resident Germans, they claimed, had no effective countermeasures against the "enchanting effect of Polish pseudo-culture" and the seductive "spells of Polish women".[87] Members of the *Ostmarkenverein*, the Pan-German League, and other proponents vocally justified nationalizing projects of German rule as both fulfilling a civilizing mission to redeem the East, and as a means to reverse this Polish barbarization.[88] Articles in *Die Ostmark*, framed potential annexations in Congress Poland as the continuation of centuries of German colonization in Eastern Europe, a benevolent process which, they argued, had brought cultural and technological advancement to the backward Slavic peoples.[89] Pan-German thinkers also fantasized about using the war to expand the racial boundaries of the biologically superior German nation.[90]

However, fervent assertions of German cultural superiority and Polish backwardness should be taken with a grain of salt. Claims of Polish primitivity frequently masked deeper anxieties about the strength of Polish nationalism as an organizing political force. Panic in Łódź over the influence of Polish intellectuals and the seduction of Germans to Polish "*Formkultur*" really spoke to German nationalists' insecurity that Polish nationalism might rival German

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[79] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 20.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Hoetzsch, "Gedanken über die politischen Ziele des Krieges," 214–33.
[82] "Deutschlands Ostgrenze jetzt und in Zukunft," 290.
[83] Ibid., 291.
[84] Ibid., 292.
[85] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 12, 96.
[86] Albert Hofacker, "Die völkische Schuld des polnischen Deutschtums," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (October 14, 1916): 1335.
[87] Ibid., 1336.
[88] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 125.
[89] Schäfer, "Deutschland und der Osten," 3–9.
[90] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 163.

culture for cultural influence in Eastern Europe. Similiarly, Dietrich Schäfer's August 1915 proposal to strategically isolate and territorially reduce a rump Poland, spoke to his concerns that a Polish state might challenge German political control in Eastern Europe. His proposals for annexations aimed both to militarily hobble and neutralize Poland, and just as importantly, to cut off its avenue for expansion into White Ruthenia. Both objectives revealed his deeper concern that Poles were less a primitive "colonial" people, than a potentially powerful and *colonizing* nation.[91] Nationalizing imperialists hoped they could make Poles into a colonial people, but on some level most recognized Polish nationhood as a sophisticated threat to Germany.

Nationalizing models of ethnic management were instead motivated by proponents' shared conviction that Polish identity was intrinsically hostile to German interests. Nationalist authors insisted that Poles desired to steal Prussian territory for a revived Polish state, and even tacitly plotted against Berlin, biding their time for the opportune moment to betray or rise up against German rule.[92] Dietrich Schäfer expressed a typical sentiment when he argued that, even in the current emergency, "The Poles now happily discuss the renunciation of their Prussian brethren".[93] The "satisfaction of Polish wishes" he argued, was "incompatible with the security of the German Empire", because Polish nationals yearned for the restoration of a Polish state inclusive of Posen and West Prussia.[94] Schäfer understood irredentism as popular, central to Polish national politics, and unlikely to dissipate in the foreseeable future. "So long as a national idea lives in the Poles," he wrote, " – and it will survive yet for some generations-, the yearning for the restoration of a greater Polish Empire will remain vital".[95] These authors believed that Germany could neither expect to convert Poles into Germans, nor expect that they would peacefully accept Berlin's control over Polish space.

Autocratic governance, colonization, and ethnic cleansing therefore all aimed to secure German imperial space from this threat of Polish national mobilization. Proponents of autocratic rule in Poland believed that rigid military administration was necessary to disrupt the organization of Polish nationalists against the German Empire. One advocate of autocratic rule warned that "the Pole is filled with the deepest hatred against everything German".[96] Covetous of Prussian territory and receptive to Russian offers of collaboration against Germany, he cautioned that granting Poles either autonomy or access to positions of responsibility would only facilitate their anti-German plots.[97] An autonomous Polish government would declare its independence at the first opportunity, and then seek the assistance of the Entente powers to claim Prussian territory.[98] The author considered organizing Polish military units particularly dangerous.[99] Supporters considered the systematic repression of political and military organization essential to safeguarding Germany, because an autonomous or fully independent Poland might equip Polish nationalists for their crusade against the German Empire. "An independent Poland", one wrote, "would be a mortal danger for us. It would immediately attach itself to Russia, and with Russia's help tear Posen and Danzig away from us".[100] Germany could secure its eastern frontier, these authors argued, only by comprehensively barring treacherous Poles from venues of political organization, and by monopolizing military resources –arms, trained units, officers, etc. – in German hands. One summarized that "the land, which Germany requires for its improved defense, must be unequivocally and firmly in German hands".[101] Supporters of colonization and ethnic cleansing similarly hoped to defend the German Empire from Polish treachery, but by

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[91] Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 109.
[92] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 12; Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 104.
[93] Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 104.
[94] Ibid., 111.
[95] Ibid., 104.
[96] Faust, "Die polnische Gefahr.," 168.
[97] Ibid., 168–69.
[98] Ibid., 172.
[99] Ibid., 170–71.
[100] Lezius, "Deutschland Und Der Osten," 161.
[101] "Deutschlands Ostgrenze jetzt und in Zukunft," 295.

reducing the relative size of the resident Polish population, and hence their potential threat.[102]

The equation of Polish identity with imperial disloyalty fed upon an exaggerated fear of diversity inherited from certain traditions of German nationalism. 19th century Germans shared a narrative of Central Europe that equated German disunity with military vulnerability and national catastrophe.· For many, the political unification of the German Empire achieved in 1871 had not been completed by a subsequent cultural unification of the German nation. Unity remained fragile. To resolve this vulnerability, more anxious nationalists had demanded the extirpation of cultural identities that compete with the German nation-state for the loyalties of German citizens. Security required unity. Unity required cultural homogeneity. Nationalizing imperialism therefore corresponded to an uncompromising commitment to the creation of an ethnically homogenous German nation-state domestically. Nationalists thus strongly cautioned Berlin not to allow Germany to become a "multinational empire" through gains made in the war.[103] National communities, they argued, naturally pursued different interests, a condition that invariably produced strife or political disunity in multinational states.[104] Only uniting political and cultural identities in the mold of a nation-state, could avoid such disruptions.[105] Consequently, proponents of nationalist ethnic management agreed that the continuation of Prussia's pre-war *Ostmarkenpolitik* was necessary to fortify the German nation-state.[106]

German nationalists equated national homogeneity with political unity, and political unity with German security. They believed that Polish national identity was both immutable, and inherently threatening to German imperial integrity. In consequence, they argued that Berlin could only hope to control Congress Polish territory through autocratic rule over Poles, their systematic political and military disempowerment, their replacement with German settlers, or through some mixture of these methods.

Multinational Imperialism as a Model for Establishing Control over Poland

However, these nationalist projects competed with *multinational* vision of German imperium. Like its counterpart, multinational imperialism drew from an established tradition of German nationalism to articulate a comprehensive vision of domestic and European order. Between August 1914 and November 1916, multinationalists struggled with the same paradox of projecting German strategic control into Congress Poland without risking Polish subversion, insurrection, revolt, or the creation of a "fifth-column" for foreign rivals. Multinational imperialists wanted to achieve the same objectives: condensing and fortifying Germany's effective border with Russia, gaining forward deployment bases for future conflicts, and even increasing the size of Germany's future military resources. Many even shared nationalists' anxieties about German demographic decline. This diverse faction of political observers, however, held fundamentally different assumptions about the political role of national identity. They agreed with their nationalist counterparts that national identity emerged naturally and was, from a practical standpoint, immutable. Yet they differed with nationalists on the relationship between national identity and political loyalty. Multinationalists maintained that Germany should actively seek to collaborate with Polish nationalism, rather than assume its inherent hostility. The German Empire and the Polish nation, these authors argued, shared common interests and common opponents, and both would be mutually served by a German-led multinational imperial system. By creating systems that guaranteed national political and cultural autonomy for Poles, multinationalists insisted that Germany secure control over Congress Poland and the loyalty of its population, bolstering Germany's effective military force with the addition of a new Polish military contingent. Indeed, multinationalists demanded on a complete reversal of pre-war German Polish policy. They demanded that Germany refrain from policies that aimed to

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[102] "Der Niedergang des Ansiedlungswerkes," *Die Ostmark*, April 1913, 29.

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[103] Albert Hofacker, "Der übernationale Staat und der Nationalstaat," *Das größere Deutschland*, September 23, 1916, 1240.

[104] Ibid., 1241; Schäfer, "Deutschland und der Osten," 5.

[105] Hofacker, "Der übernationale Staat und der Nationalstaat," 1241.

[106] Conze, "Nationalstaat oder Mitteleuropa," 211.

diminish or undermine Polish cultural or political influence. Instead, they supported policies to deliberately bolster Polish political, military, and strategic resources, and channel them through a newly invigorated Pro-German Polish nationalism.

Multinational imperial projects for Congress Poland drew active support primarily from three political traditions in Germany: left liberals, Roman Catholics (especially among the Center Party), and moderate conservatives. Left liberals, organized around the Progressive People's Party (*Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* or FVP) furnished by far the largest and most publicly influential contingent of multinationalists. Though often pronounced monarchists, left liberals generally endorsed expanding the role of the Reichstag in imperial governance, and supported an extensive program of domestic reform. The FVP had grown from a series of progressive movements in the late 19th century attempting to redress the social iniquities produced by rapid industrialization. Groups like Friedrich Naumann's *National Social Association* (*Nationalsozialer Verein* or NSV), one of the many predecessors of the FVP, had defended a platform of social reform meant to reconcile the working classes and capitalist elites within the framework of the imperial constitution.[107] Left liberals usually favored the expansion of Germany's strategic influence and colonial holdings as necessary for the continued survival of the state.[108] Indeed, many insisted that the objectives of domestic social reform and imperial expansion abroad would buttress one another, both bolstering the national power, and therefore long-term security, of the German Empire.[109] Successful pacification of the working classes through social reform would, they hoped, reinforce the loyalty of the masses to the state and bolster Berlin's ability to mobilize their energies in national emergency.[110] Conversely, left liberal intellectuals often aggressively supported overseas colonization, hoping that the raw materials, surplus labor, and agricultural commodities extracted from the Bushveld of Southwest Africa or the slopes of Kilimanjaro would support a higher standard of living for Germans at home.[111]

Left liberals publicly agitated for multinational imperialism. From 1914 through 1916, influential periodicals like *Preußische Jahrbücher, Die Hilfe*, and *Das Größere Deutschland* (from 1916 *Deutsche Politik*), overflowed with articles promoting multinational imperialism in Poland. They were led by left liberal academics, politicians, and publicists influential throughout the German Empire. The historian and publicist Hans Delbrück was the intellectual elder of the group. Born in 1848, Delbrück had studied at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin under the Heinrich von Treitschke, who secured him the chair of military history in Berlin in 1885, and employed him at the influential monthly, *Preußische Jahrbücher*.[112] Delbrück served as a Free Conservative deputy of the Prussian House of Representatives, before winning election to the Reichstag in 1884 as a member of the German Imperial Party (*Deutsche Reichspartei*), where he sat until 1890.[113] In 1889, Delbrück usurped von Treitschke's position as editor of *Preußische Jahrbücher* and forced him from the staff. Hereafter, Delbrück gravitated towards left liberal circles. This was reflected in the pages of *Preußische Jahrbücher*, which Delbrück used to vigorously criticize Prussia's budding anti-Polish policies.[114]

In the first two years of the war, Delbrück's younger associate Friedrich Naumann, quickly became the center of gravity for multinationalist imperial thought. Born in Saxony in 1860, Naumann had initially embarked on a career as a Protestant Pastor, before turning to politics to redress the social iniquities emerging from rapid industrialization.[115] In the 1890s, Naumann organized his own left liberal political movement mixing Christian ethics, socialist

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[107] Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 87–88.
[108] Asaf Kedar, "National Socialism Before Nazism: Friedrich Naumann and Theodor Fritsch, 1890-1914" (University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 35.
[109] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 88–90.
[110] Ibid., 88; Kedar, "National Socialism Before Nazism," 38.
[111] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 93.
[112] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 302.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Kedar, "National Socialism Before Nazism," 26.

reform, and nationalism.[116] Naumann's NSV ultimately folded into what would become the FVP, but *Die Hilfe*, the press organ he founded in 1894 to support the fledgling movement, was still thriving in 1914. In WWI, Naumann remained an influential political publicist and sat as an FVP representative for Württemberg in the Reichstag.

Naumann's longtime friend Paul Rohrbach was, in 1914, a leading expert on foreign and colonial policy in both left liberal circles and the German public in general.[117] Rohrbach had been born in 1869 to a Baltic German family in Russian Courland. After Russification had closed off his avenues for academic advancement at the University of Dorpat, Rohrbach had relocated to the German Empire. Rohrbach first encountered Delbrück as a student of theology, geography, economics, and history in Berlin, and the historian's lectures exerted a lasting influence on the young Rohrbach's political and economic views.[118] Rohrbach worked closely with Delbrück, and in 1894 he began regularly contributing to *Preußische Jahrbücher*.[119] In subsequent decades, Rohrbach regularly attended Delbrück's Wednesday-evening intellectual gatherings in Berlin. Delbrück even considered him for his own replacement as editor of *Preußische Jahrbücher.* In the late 1890s, Rohrbach also developed a close relationship with Friedrich Naumann.[120] In 1898, he began working for Naumann on *Die Hilfe*, and regularly contributing articles on foreign affairs to the weekly magazine.[121] In 1903, Rohrbach took a post as the settlement commissioner of German Southwest Africa for the Colonial Department. He continued to contribute to *Die Hilfe* and *Preußische Jahrbücher*, and after returning to Germany in 1906, quickly established his reputation as an experienced and knowledgeable commentator on colonial affairs and German foreign policy. In the Spring of 1914, he founded *Das Größere Deutschland*, a weekly journal for imperial interests. When war broke in the summer, Rohrbach was both a public authority on foreign affairs, and incredibly well connected with government circles in Berlin.

Indeed, a phalanx of influential left liberal intellectuals supported of multinationalism in Poland. In WWI, Max Weber renounced the Pan-German League and endorsed multinational strategies for managing Polish space.[122] Friedrich Meinecke and Ignaz Jastrow, both historians and leading voices in German left liberal circles, also wrote in support of multinational imperialism in Poland. Other prominent left liberal multinationalists included: Axel Schmidt, Rohrbach's fellow Baltic German, frequent journalistic partner, and Russian expert; Ernst Jäckh, a respected Berlin Professor of Turkish History, near eastern expert, and coeditor of *Das Größere Deutschland*, and Georg Gothein; the FVP Reichstag representative for Greifswald.

Roman Catholicism also provided a rich vain of sympathy for multinational imperialism in Congress Poland. German Catholics, organized around the Center Party, had not perceived Prussia's polish minority as an urgent threat before the war. Quite the opposite, Polish and German speaking Catholics had together fought Prussia's repressive anti-Ultramontane legislation in the first decades of the empire. The Center Party consistently obstructed and worked to dismantle of Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik*, in part because they feared any exceptional legislation might serve as a precedent for future anti-Catholic policies.[123] Contemporary Roman Catholic theology further lent itself to multinational ideas of statehood. Throughout the 19th century, Catholic theologians had harbored deep reservations about the rising influence of political nationalism. The German Catholic episcopate certainly accepted the existence of distinct national communities as a beneficial manifestation of cultural diversity desired by God. They believed that national cultures were divinely created, each to offer a unique contribution to

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Walter Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland": Ethischer Imperialismus im wilhelmischen Zeitalter, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kulturprotestantismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1972), 145.
[118] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 13.
[119] Ibid., 14.
[120] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 19.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 740.
[123] Rebecca Ayako Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for Inclusion after Unification* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), see Chapter 9.

the grand arc of human salvation.[124] "Every country and every people," one Jesuit observer wrote in 1915, "has its own culture, its capital of material, intellectual, and moral values, through which it distinguishes itself from other nations".[125] There must be, he continued, "different men with different faculties and virtues, so that they may complement, assist and advance each other. There must be different nations, which develop their characteristics and thereby stimulate and shape other nations. Each nation has its own advantages…".[126]

However, the Roman Catholic episcopate explicitly prioritized the Christian obligation to love one's neighbor over national claims.[127] In the midst of WWI, Catholic publicists cited Paul's epistle to the Galatians, stating "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".[128] They warned that modern nationalist politics threatened to drive wedges between communities, and cautioned their readers not to worship the nation as a "Golden Calf", or allow an idolized nation to justify sin.[129] German Catholic writers emphasized that all belonged to universal religious community, "Africans as well as Aryans" and that the harmonious unity of nations was a mission of the Catholic Church.[130] Catholics were enjoined to work to temper nationalist rhetoric and reconcile the German, French, and Slavic peoples of Europe after the war.[131] Consequently, Catholics tended to endorse the legitimacy state authority over nationalist claims. One author renounced the "often asserted right of every large and capable nation, to constitute their own state from their members under all circumstances" as "incompatible with the peace of the world".[132] Seeing moral value in national heterogeneity, but danger in the principle of national self-determination, German Catholics called for governments to accept pluralism and avoid policies of cultural homogenization.[133] Catholic authors often rebuked war aims that relied on homogenization to manage local populations.[134] Conversely, multinational imperialism struck many Catholic observers as congruent with their principles.[135]

A number of German Catholic publicists and politicians supported multinational expansion into Poland during WWI. Julius Bachem remained, in the first two years, one of the most prominent public supporters of such a solution to the so-called Polish question. Born in 1845, Bachem had become an attorney in 1873 in the midst of the *Kulturkampf*. He had cut his teeth defending Catholic press rights from encroachments by the Prussian State. He served, from 1869 until 1914, as the editor in chief of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, the leading Catholic daily in western Germany. Bachem was elected as a Center Party deputy to the Prussian House of Representatives in 1877, and served until personal scandal wrecked his political career. He remained, into WWI, a highly influential voice in Catholic politics.

Finally an array of conservative intellectuals and publicists prominently endorsed multinational imperialism in Poland. Adolf Grabowsky, representative of the "Young Conservative" movement, had studied law and political science.[136] He worked briefly as a jurist

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[124] Peter Lippert, "Zum Beginn des europäischen Krieges," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 87 (1914): 574; Jakob Obermans S.J., "Review of 'Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt,'" *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 88 (1915): 485.
[125] Christian Pesch, S.J., "Die christliche Vaterlandsliebe," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 88 (1915): 518.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, see especially Chapter 9.
[128] Obermans S.J., "Review of 'Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt,'" 485.
[129] Otto Zimmerman S.J., "Deutsche Religion?," *Stimmen der Zeit* 91 (1916): 327; Dieter Langewiesche, "Föderative Nationalismus als Erbe der deutschen Reichsnation: über Föderalismus und Zentralismus in der deutschen Nationalgeschichte," in *Föderative Nation: Deutschlandkonzepte von der Reformation bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Georg Schmidt (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2000), 220.
[130] Peter Lippert, "Die Nationen in der katholischen Kirche," *Stimmen der Zeit* 89 (1915): 310.
[131] Ibid., 308–10.
[132] Jakob Obermans S.J., "Die Erfüllung der polnischen Sehnsucht," *Stimmen der Zeit* 92 (1916): 389..
[133] Lippert, "Zum Beginn des europäischen Krieges," 574–75; Lippert, "Die Nationen in der katholischen Kirche," 312.
[134] Peter Lippert, "Weltkrieg und religiöses Bekenntnis," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 88 (1915): 9.
[135] Pesch, S.J., "Die christliche Vaterlandsliebe," 512–17.
[136] Gerd Koenen, "Der deutsche Russland-Komplex: Zur Ambivalenz deutscher Ostorientierungen in der Weltkriegsphase," in *Traumland Osten: Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 25.

before founding, along with his fellow conservative Richard Schmidt, *Zeitschrift für Politik*, a long-format journal for political issues. In 1914 he also took over as editor for *Das Neue Deutschland*, the self-described "Weekly for Conservative Progress".[137] Grabowsky would emerge as a stalwart proponent of multinational rule in Poland in the early war. Georg Cleinow another public voice for multinationalism on the right, was born in 1873 near Lublin, then part of the Russian Empire. Cleinow studied economics and Slavic history in Königsberg, Berlin, Paris, and Genf. Between 1908-1913, he published *Die Zukunft Polens*, an influential two-volume work examining the economics and politics of Congress Poland. At the same time, Cleinow overtook editorial responsibility for *Die Grenzboten*, a conservative weekly published in Posen.[138] Theodor Schiemann, a Baltic German who had studied history at the University of Dorpat, had relocated to Germany to escape stifling Russification policies, and had secured an academic appointment at the Prussian Military Academy in Berlin. Shortly thereafter he became the Chair of Eastern European history at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, where he founded the Seminar for Eastern European History and Geography in 1902.[139] In Berlin, Schiemann cultivated a prominent reputation as a regular commentator on foreign-policy and Russia in the conservative Berlin daily, *Kreuzzeitung*.[140] During WWI, Schiemann focused his attentions mainly on the future of the Baltic littoral, but he agreed with his colleague and fellow Baltic German, Paul Rohrbach, on most nationality questions in the East.

Max Sering offers the most dramatic example of conservative support for multinational imperialism in Poland. By WWI Sering had established himself as a well-regarded economist and professor in Berlin and a prominent voice in debates over Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik*. Since the early 1880s, Sering had been a leading proponent of German settlement policies in the Prussian East.[141] In 1908, Sering expanded his agitation by founding the journal, *Archiv für innere Kolonisation*. In 1912, he further organized the Society for the Promotion of Internal Colonization with Friedrich von Schwerin to pressure Berlin to support settlement policies in the East. Portrayals of Poland as colonial space, stereotypes of Polish incompetence and indolence, and calls for the necessity of German settlement in the region saturated this publication.[142] Sering, a moderate voice in this circle, insisted that Poles would eventually assimilate to German culture if Berlin could engineer a sufficient German majority in the East.[143] With the outbreak of war, von Schwerin and Hugenberg, Sering's colleagues in the society, proposed radical combinations of annexations and forcible expulsions of ethnic Poles to control Polish space.[144] Sering however, broke with his former colleagues and instead supported a hybrid policy of annexations and pronounced multinational imperialism.

Conservatives were attracted to multinationalism primarily because they believed it represented the least-worst option for resolving the German Empire's security paradox in Poland. Most importantly they trusted that Poles could be recruited as reliable collaborators for the German Empire. A few conservatives pursued additional ideological goals. Georg Cleinow believed Poland's historically large *szlachta* had saturated their national culture with "aristocratic tendencies".[145] A Polish constitutional monarchy, he hoped, would help German conservatives to revive the "aristocratic ideal" of governance in Central Europe, and insulate the region from bastardized and "anti-cultural" claims of mass democracy that might emerge in Russia after the war.[146] German Conservatives could therefore see a Polish constitutional monarchy as a *cordon sanitaire* against political radicalism.

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[137] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 61.
[138] Ibid., 58; Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 142.
[139] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 228; Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 25.
[140] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 183.
[141] Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space," 115.
[142] Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 65.
[143] Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space," 117.
[144] Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," 80–81.
[145] Georg Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," June 14, 1916, 88, N30/35, BArch.
[146] Ibid.

Multinational solutions to the Polish question also found diverse support among German academics. The Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau proved especially fertile ground.[147] During the war, a diverse party of the university's faculty authored and submitted a memorandum to Berlin in support of multinational imperialism in Poland. Organizing the memorandum was Adolf Weber, a former student of Max Sering's and a prominent economist with an interest in Eastern Europe. Professor of Catholic Theology Johannes Nikel and Professor of Metallurgy Oskar Simmersbach together authored the memorandum's section on Poland.

Along with Germans from across the political landscape, multinationalists considered Russia the most urgent contemporary threat to German security, and believed that Russia would continue to threaten Germany even after the war. They agreed that Germany's central aim during the war must be "the diminution of Russia to the greatest extent possible", and the fortification of Germany's Eastern border.[148] Authors like Paul Rohrbach and Axel Schmidt cautioned against concluding a premature peace with Russia that would secure only "meaningless border-alterations and war-indemnities".[149] Fearing that Russia would recover and even accelerate its military growth, Rohrbach decried any peace, which would leave the Russian Empire intact.[150] One contributor to *Deutsche Politik* made a representative statement: "Yet every German wishes to push out the *limes* [military frontiers] of *Germania*, such that the nightmare of 1914 for the Rhineland and Eastern Germany will never repeat".[151] The author specifically mentioned the necessity of securing military control of Poland and Courland.[152]

Multinationalists also believed that Germany's eastern border with Russia was practically indefensible. Achieving some form of German strategic influence over Poland thus became an urgent priority for improving the German Empire's security. Max Weber described the fate of Congress Poland as a "question of existence" for the German Empire.[153] Multinationalists perceived essentially the same danger of Russian military strength and essentially the same opportunity to resolve German vulnerability by seizing Congress Poland. To control Central Poland would drive back the Russian army behind a shorter and more defensible border along the Bug river.[154] Berlin needed to control this territory but its long-term security also relied on its ability to pacify and politically stabilize the region.[155]

In their thoughts on ethnic management multinationalists differed sharply from their nationalist counterparts. Though optimistic about the potential for multinational collaboration, proponents admitted that the solution was perilous. Indeed, multinationalists often introduced their position, not by expounding upon the virtues of tolerant pluralism, but by systematically excoriating alternative solutions to the Polish question as more impractical or threatening.

Multinationalists outright rejected direct annexation of Polish territory to Prussia.[156] They frequently reminded their readers that Prussia's historic attempts to Germanize its Polish population through education had utterly failed.[157] The idea of Germanizing the Polish inhabitants of Congress Poland was therefore rarely, if ever, seriously entertained. Naumann staunchly opposed Germanization as futile and counterproductive.[158] He provided one of the clearest theoretical engagements with the problem of nationalism, but his analysis typified assumptions widely held by multinationalists. Naumann understood nations as inherited packages of cultural norms and narratives.[159] He argued that national identities had only become politically relevant

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[147] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 124–25.
[148] Paul Rohrbach, "England und Rußland, unsere Gegner," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (January 1, 1916): 9.
[149] Paul Rohrbach, "Friedensgerüchte – Friedensgefahr," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (January 16, 1915): 65.
[150] Paul Rohrbach, "Weiterfechten," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 8, 1915): 610.
[151] Richard Fester, "Reale Garantien," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (August 18, 1916): 1455.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 739–40.
[154] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 13.
[155] Adolf Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1916), 7, 75.
[156] Jäckh, "Grundlagen deutscher Weltpolitik," 63.
[157] Axel Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 35 (August 28, 1915): 1145.
[158] Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 73.
[159] Friedrich Naumann, *Kriegsgedanken zur Welt- und Seelengeschichte* (Vienna: Verlag des Volksbildungshauses Wiener Urania, 1917).

and popular in Europe in the 18th century.[160] Indeed, national identity in the early 20th century still seemed remarkably fluid to Naumann. "Old German noble families" he wrote, "now play the role of Czech fanatics".[161] He likewise noted that Bohemians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire regularly changed their national identification between censuses, sometimes claiming Czech, other times German, nationality.[162] However, the emergence of both public education and print culture, he believed, had popularized national identity, and thus anchored it more firmly.[163] Wherever vernacular elites had already emerged to lead, organize, and assert the claims of their national communities, Naumann argued that nations would prove both resilient to state-led homogenization projects, and capable of mobilizing populations for political ends.[164]

Naumann concluded that states could neither hope to homogenize, nor afford to ignore, national minorities. Modern states, Naumann argued, could now efficiently marshal collaboration from their citizens by appealing to national symbols, but also needed to more conspicuously manage their popular legitimacy.[165] Nationalism remained a powerful force in Central Europe that required careful study and management.[166] "Winning foreign-language populations for an alternative nation-state [*andersprachlichen Nationalstaat*]," he wrote, "is a much more complicated matter" and required more to resolve than "a few prohibitions and the deportation of several leaders".[167] Like his colleagues, Naumann concluded by reminding his readers that, despite decades of Germanization, Poles remained a separate, and politically organized, national community. "All the German school instruction indeed made them into useful and employable bilinguals, but not into Germans. The Pole remains a Pole…".[168]

Paul Rohrbach similarly scoffed at the prospect of Germanizing Congress Poland, given Prussia's dismal record of failure.[169] His own personal experiences reinforced this conviction. Born in Russian Courland, Rohrbach had grown up in a community of Baltic Germans pressed by Russification and understood, firsthand, how ineffective homogenization policies could be. He later recalled how his community in Mitau shuttered their elementary schools, rather than accept inferior teachers dispatched by St. Petersburg. He described with mirth, how Germans organized elicit private courses in homes and smuggled schoolbooks in market baskets under piles of vegetables.[170] He also deeply resented Russification. He later described his own "brutal" treatment by the Russian curator of the University of Dorpat.[171] Throughout his wartime writings, Rohrbach frequently mentioned that Russification had been completely ineffective, and had only alienated a community otherwise loyal to St. Petersburg.

Indeed, most multinationalists agreed on the counter-productivity of Germanization policies. Multinationalists frequently warned that Poles would resist any effort to replace the "national thinking" that was "deeply engraved" into the "social structures" of the Polish people with "full assimilation" into German culture.[172] Adolf Grabowsky dismissed any attempt to Germanize Polish Russians as "useless" and "harmful".[173] Aside from their obvious and

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[160] Ibid., 55.
[161] Friedrich Naumann, *Deutschland und Oesterreich* (Berlin: Verlag der "Hilfe," 1900), 22.
[162] Ibid. Naumann's observation proved astute. Subsequent historiography on the Austro-Hungarian Empire has likewise noted the pronounced ambiguity of national identity in many regions, or even the ambivalence of many Habsburg subjects towards ethnic politics. See especially: Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
[163] Naumann, *Kriegsgedanken zur Welt- und Seelengeschichte*, 56–67.
[164] Ibid., 59.
[165] Ibid., 58.
[166] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 60.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., 74.
[169] Paul Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 28 (July 10, 1915): 916.
[170] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 15.
[171] Ibid., 13.
[172] Aleksander von Guttry, *Die Polen und der Weltkrieg; Ihre politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Russland, Preussen und Österreich* (Munich: G. Müller, 1915), XV.
[173] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 75.

"ridiculous" failure, multinationalists shared Rohrbach's view that past Germanization policies had only managed to make Berlin "hated" by Poles who felt that their culture was under attack.[174] They urged Berlin not to repeat this mistake in Congress Poland.[175]

Yet multinationalists considered the annexation of Polish territory, without the realistic prospect of Germanization, equally threatening to German interests.[176] Observers like Gothein had little faith in Berlin's ability to win the loyalty of these new subjects, given the Prussian bureaucracy's "extraordinary talent for awakening antipathy" among its non-German citizens.[177] Like nationalists they worried that any direct annexation of Polish territory would bring with it a disaffected Polish population, prone to organizing national resistance, subversion, and even revolt. Multinationalists broadly agreed that Congress Poles desired some degree of control over their own governance, and would resist direct German rule. Axel Schmidt echoed nationalist concerns when he warned that any further partition of Polish territory, would only anger Polish elites and mobilize the population against the central powers. Annexation risked driving Polish nationals into open revolt.[178] Friedrich Naumann agreed, warning that if Germany failed to "satisfy" the Polish "national idea" in Congress Poland, than it could expect a Polish revolution, "as soon as the [international] military conditions seem to permit it".[179] "Warsaw," he continued, "would rather destroy itself than voluntarily enter a new period of subjugation".[180]

Worse yet, they feared that a large and disaffected population of Polish nationalists would readily collaborate with Berlin's rivals in pursuit of independence. The Russian Empire, having recovered from the present war, could easily recruit incensed Poles to act as a fifth column in the German Empire.[181] Multinationalists doubted that Polish subjects would tolerate German rule in the future if Petrograd could credibly promise to liberate their territory from Prussian sovereignty and offer them some form of national self-governance.[182] Even if Congress Poles passively accepted Prussian sovereignty in peacetime, multinationalists feared that they would betray the German Empire in the event of war, sabotaging supply lines, defecting to the Russian Empire, or taking up arms in open revolt. In short, multinationalists concluded that a "coercively centralized empire on the Roman or Napoleonic model" now contradicted the "sharply developed national feeling of modern" populations.[183] Ignoring the mobilizing potential of Polish nationalism would only expose an expanded German Empire to catastrophe in the long term.

For similar reasons, few were willing to support the creation of a sovereign Polish state. Germans feared that Polish nationalist politicians would eventually push a completely sovereign Warsaw to 'reclaim' the German territories of Posen, West Prussia, and Silesia, either by tacitly supporting and equipping secessionist insurgencies, launching their own military offensive, or aligning themselves with Berlin's rivals.[184] The prospect led even the conciliatory Naumann to

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[174] Fr. W. Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," June 15, 1915, 165, R1501/119779, BArch.
[175] Hans Rost, "Lehren und Konsequenzen des Weltkriegs," *Historisch-Politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 154 (1914): 651.
[176] Friedrich Meinecke insisted that Germany seize "as little Poland land as possible" Friedrich Meinecke, "Letter to Karl Hampe, 17 June 1915," in *Neue Briefe Und Dokumente*, ed. Gisela Bock and Gerhard Ritter, vol. X, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 206; Freiherr von Mackay, "Kriegsziele – Kriegserkenntnis II," *Das größere Deutschland*, September 25, 1915, 1264. See also: Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 909; Hans Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 1915, 134; Ignaz Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," November 19, 1915, 121, N30/34, BArch.
[177] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 23.
[178] Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," 1145–46.
[179] Friedrich Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1917), 33–34.
[180] Ibid., 34.
[181] Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," 1145–46. Adolf Grabowsky agreed: Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 71–73; Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 121.
[182] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 22.
[183] "Review: 'H. Mühlestein, Der Vorrang der deutschen Staatsidee und ihr Sieg in Europa,'" *Deutsche Politik* 1 (March 24, 1916): 624; Max Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (December 8, 1916): 2161.
[184] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 121.

reject Polish sovereignty outright.[185] Most agreed that Polish independence was, in principle, contrary to Prussia's continued sovereignty in the *Ostmark*.[186] In 1915, the editorial staff of *Das Größere Deutschland* collectively rejected Polish independence, demanding to know "What guarantees" would prevent Poland from stoking "unrest in the Polish territories of Prussia-Germany?".[187] Politicians like Georg Gothein worried that an independent Polish state would invariably develop into a "center for Polish agition", a territorial base in which Polish insurgents could organize political and paramilitary campaigns free from German censorship, surveillance, or police.[188] When Adolf Grabowsky described an independent Poland as an "eastern Serbia" he was already trafficking in clichés.[189]

Yet more daunting than a territorial base for Polish nationalists was the possibility that an independent Poland would destabilize East Central Europe, or that Warsaw might pursue an overtly anti-German foreign policy. Complete sovereignty simply offered no assurance that a Polish state would serve Berlin's strategic interests as a "firm Bulwark" against Russia.[190] Hans Delbrück worried that an independent Polish state might embark on a grand campaign to restore the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Lithuania, Volhynia, Podolia, and White Ruthenia. The resulting clash with the Russian Empire would invariably draw Germany into a broader regional war.[191] A worst-case scenario, that either Russia or another rival might influence Warsaw haunted multinationalists. Authors like Grabowsky worried that an independent Poland would eventually conclude an alliance with the Russian Empire, and they would together work to seize those territories claimed by Polish nationalists along Prussia's still vulnerable eastern frontier.[192] German authors also portrayed a sovereign Poland as reproducing the international conditions of the 17th and 18th centuries, in which French, Russian, and German lobbies wrestled for influence among factions of Polish szlachta. "The Vistula country," one author commanded, "may never again be turned into a vector of attack [*Einfallstor*] against us by means of French money, nor with Russian rubles, nor English sovereigns".[193] In short, German multinationalists believed that complete independence deprived Berlin of any means of policing radical Polish nationalists, restraining Warsaw's regional ambitions, or directing Poland's foreign policy to its own ends. They considered all three indispensible prerequisites for German security in Eastern Europe.[194]

German multinationalists loathed the prospect of an Austro-Polish solution even more. Polish Austrian politicians and publicists had advocated the turnover of Congress Poland to Austria-Hungary from the beginning of the war. The idea resonated in German circles initially.[195] However, German support soured relatively quickly. Austria-Hungary's repeated military catastrophes in 1914, first in Serbia, then in the Carpathian Campaign, eroded German confidence in the ability of Austrian arms to defend the German Empire's eastern flank from future Russian aggression.[196] Support for the Austro-Polish solution evaporated as multinationalists decided that the German Empire could trust only itself to secure this territory.[197]

Germans also worried that an Austro-Polish solution would not resolve their country's fundamental vulnerabilities. The frontier of Congress Poland simply remained too close to

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[185] Friedrich Naumann, "Wir und die Polen," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben*, January 1, 1916, 890.
[186] Wilhelm von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (August 18, 1916): 1465.
[187] "Polnischer Blätter," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (October 23, 1915): 1431.
[188] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 22.
[189] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 67.
[190] von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," 1469.
[191] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 132–33.
[192] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 66–67.
[193] R. Hildebrandt, "Polen und Deutschland," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 3, no. 22 (May 1, 1916): 111–12.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," 1146.
[196] Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora: Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2014), 186–88.
[197] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 87; Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 740.

Berlin, for any state other than Germany to command the territory.[198] Ignaz Jastrow and Georg Gothein both pointed out that Austria-Hungary, today's ally, could easily become an opponent in the future, in which case the "capitulation of Poland" to Austria would require Germany to defend an impossible frontier from the "Baltic Sea to the Carpathians, and from there to the Bodensee".[199] Berlin could not allow itself to become so "dependent" upon, and vulnerable to, any foreign state, regardless of how friendly current relations were.[200] Indeed, multinationalists worried that incorporating Congress Poland into the Austro-Hungarian Empire would impel Vienna to adopt increasingly anti-German foreign policies. Observers like Adolf Grabowsky and Hans Delbrück feared that Polish nationalists would pressure Vienna sponsor their irredentist claims in Prussia.[201] Delbrück wondered if Austro-Trialism might mitigate this influence by segregating Poland from the Reichsrat.[202] But Germans feared that trialism would also grant Poland disproportionate indirect influence, by giving them the same leverage over military spending and financial arrangements enjoyed by Transleithanian authorities. Polish nationalists could simply use this indirect influence to foist an irredentist agenda on Vienna.[203] Even those multinationalists who considered the Austro-Polish solution in the early months of the war therefore often demanded significant border revisions, or even demographic reengineering, along the eastern frontier to fortify the empire. In a personal letter to the politician Gerhard von Schulze-Gaevernitz in late August 1914, Friedrich Meinecke signaled that he might support an Austro-Trialist solution for Congress Poland. However, the handover of this territory would require Berlin to accelerate its settlement and Germanization programs in Posen until the resident "Polish element begins to become harmless" and to act "accommodatingly" in matters of language and national agitation. Meinecke further suggested that it might be necessary to "relocate" certain Polish landowners from Posen onto vacated Russian state properties in Congress Poland, to secure the *Ostmark* from potential irredentism.[204]

Multinationalist thinkers also disdained the radical nationalist solutions proposed by the Pan-German League and the *Ostmarkenverein*. Nationalist calls to purge annexed territory of its Polish and Jewish inhabitants struck many observers as ludicrous. Many had staked out their opposition to fantasies of annexations and ethnic cleansing in Poland before 1914. In private correspondence between Ernst Jäckh and Friedrich Naumann in 1913, the two expressed their disdain for the premise of population expulsions.[205] In the spring of 1914, Ernst Jäckh had written an article on the impossibility of "evacuation methods" in Poland.[206] Jäckh, dismissed proponents as irresponsible and ill-informed dilettantes who advocated clearly unrealistic and unethical solutions to Germany's strategic quandaries: "politicians of the 'If I were the Kaiser' style".[207] Paul Rohrbach also trenchantly criticized the Pan-Germans throughout the war. In late September of 1914, he already warned his readers against the falsehood of Pan-German fantasies of expansion.[208] He denounced proposed Polish expulsions as "outrageous".[209] Rohrbach would often repeat this ethical objection to mass expulsions.[210]

To multinationalists, basing German continental security demographic re-engineering annexed Polish space simply seemed impractical. One author denounced proposals for mass expulsions of Poles and legally regulated "population exchanges" between the German Empire

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[198] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 740.
[199] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 121.Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 19.
[200] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 121.
[201] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 132; Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 86–87.
[202] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 132.
[203] von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," 1467.
[204] Friedrich Meinecke, "Letter to Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz, 30 August 1914," in *Neue Briefe Und Dokumente*, ed. Gisela Bock and Gerhard Ritter, vol. X, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 197.
[205] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 108.
[206] Jäckh, "Grundlagen deutscher Weltpolitik," 63.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Paul Rohrbach, "Sorge, Weg und Wille," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 26, 1914): 759.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Paul Rohrbach, "Die russischen Fremdvölker und wir," *Deutsche Politik* 2 (June 22, 1917): 795.

and a potential future Polish state as counterproductive.[211] The mass resettlement of Polish civilians, he argued, would invariably require coercion, and would scuttle any goodwill that the German Empire might hope to develop with Polish nationals. By 1916, Max Sering openly mocked discussions of a Polish border-strip, arguing the cost of permanently alienating Germany from its European neighbors far outweighed the strategic gains to be had in this minor border rectification.[212] Having briefly entertained expelling Polish landowners from Posen in August 1914, by October Friedrich Meinecke had openly broken with policies that relied on resettlement to Germanize annexations in Poland.[213] In June of 1916, he still opposed "national redistributions of land" in the Prussian *Ostmark* and in Congress Poland, as these would only alienate Germany's relations with the West-Slavic nations.[214] He and Max Weber agreed that Berlin had more to gain from West-Slavic goodwill than from permanent security within a minor strip of land in the East.[215] Even if there were enough German peasants to settle this territory, which Weber doubted, such a "German-national-policy" would only make millions of Poles, Czechs, Slovakians, and other Slavs into "mortal enemies" of Germany and "partisans of Russia".[216]

Paul Rohrbach wrote, during the war, that Germany needed to decide how it would assert its influence on the global power. "Can we found a *Weltstaat* just as the Romans did, in which we oppress the world? We cannot and nor do we want to".[217] The German Empire, Rohrbach believed, needed to develop a novel form of imperial organization to confront the realities of modern nationalist politics if Berlin would hope to successfully extend its control over Poland. "What we must find, is thus a new political greater-model [*Großform*] of multinational-existence [*Völkerdaseins*]".[218]

Rohrbach and like-minded Germans hoped that multinational imperial structures would effectively negotiate the challenges of expanding German strategic control into ethnically diverse space. They insisted that Polish nationalism was not inherently hostile to the interests of the German Empire, and that, with more tolerant and diplomatic strategies of ethnic management, Poles could be recruited as loyal collaborators in the German imperial project. Multinationalists believed that German imperial and Polish national interests overlapped to a surprising degree, and presumed that Polish national aspirations could be satisfied and manipulated by Berlin with relative ease. Supporters aimed to strike a grand bargain between the German Empire and Polish nationalists. Berlin, they believed, should realize Polish nationalist aspirations to the greatest extent possible, building an autonomous Polish state from Congress Poland. In return, German multinationalists demanded Polish loyalty to a permanent military and political union with the German Empire, with the objective of more efficiently defending both German and Polish space from future Russian aggression. The German Empire and the Polish nation, they hoped would together present an unshakeable phalanx to the east.

Multinational plans for the reorganization of Congress Poland inverted nationalist assumptions about Poles and imperial security. Rather than repressing and crippling Polish political and strategic influence, multinational solutions aimed to empower a new Polish state. Multinationalists dreamed of forging a powerful satellite kingdom as an extension of German military power, and therefore hoped that Poland would build a large, and modern army trained to the exacting standards of the Prussian drill.[219] Proposals all included two essential ingredients. First, in order to both satisfy Polish aspirations for self-governance, and to ensure Poles that Berlin would not threaten their national culture, multinationalists insisted that a new Polish state

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[211] von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," 1466.
[212] Max Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 5, no. 42 (November 20, 1916): 189.
[213] Friedrich Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," *Die Hilfe*, October 15, 1914, 684.
[214] Friedrich Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," *Neue Rundschau*, June 27, 1916, 563.
[215] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 739.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Paul Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?* (Weimar: Gustave Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1917), 44.WKKWF, 44.
[218] Ibid., 45.
[219] Friedrich Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 894.

possess robust autonomy. Warsaw alone was to decide most matters of daily governance, and would retain complete control over matters of confession, cultural and educational policy, administration, domestic police, and the judiciary. Poland would have its own monarchy, administration, parliament, schools, and universities. Most importantly, multinationalists largely agreed that Warsaw must recruit, train, and command its own army. A polish military would furnish Warsaw with a standing deterrent against Berlin's meddling in Poland's domestic and cultural administration, as well as an implied instrument of last resort to defend its autonomy.

Secondly, to secure Germany's strategic interests in Poland, multinationalist proposals insisted that this new Polish state recognize German suzerainty. Poland would become a permanent appendage of Germany in military and international relations. Multinationalists agreed that Berlin would need to direct a unified foreign policy for this German-Polish union in order to ensure that the new Polish state would serve German security. In the event of war, Berlin would assume command of the Polish military, leading the armies of the German-Polish union in common operations. German multinationalists proposed a variety of solutions to the Polish question, ranging from the inclusion of Poland in a large Central European confederation under German leadership (*Mitteleuropa*), to the creation of a Polish state in direct political and military union with Germany, and even to the organization of a Polish Kingdom as a new federal state within the German Empire. Each of these solutions, however, relied on the centralization of Poland's foreign policy and military command in Berlin, and the simultaneous devolution of virtually all other competences to Warsaw.

The most popular multinationalist program envisioned the creation of a large Central European confederation under German leadership. Multinationalists hoped to build a fully autonomous Kingdom of Poland as a member of this confederation, alongside the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Friedrich Naumann quickly became the leading proponent of this solution to the Polish question. He began developing his program in the autumn of 1914, and famously laid out the proposal in his 1915 book *Mitteleuropa*. Naumann worried that Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the smaller nations of Central Europe all faced an existential threat from Russia. Naumann believed that innovations in military equipment and tactics had fundamentally changed the nature of warfare. Machine Guns, barbed wire, and heavy artillery seemed to have permanently reduced the effectiveness of offensive maneuver. Future states would only be able to defend themselves if they could concentrate large quantities of men and materiel to defend strong fortifications along the entirety of their borders.[220] He predicted that security would increasingly depend on the ratio of its demographic, industrial, and agricultural resources, to the length of the border that it defended. Naumann's "politics of the trenches" relied on maximizing a state's military resources, while minimizing the length of its borders.[221] This did not bode well for the German or Austro-Hungarian Empires, whose long and winding borders encompassed only relatively small territories, especially when compared with "world-states" like Russia and the British Empire.[222] The industrial scale of warfare would eventually render the individual states of continental Europe unable to defend their independence.[223]

To secure their independence from the Russian Empire, Naumann proposed that Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Poland enter into a political, economic, and military union, a multinational "confederation of states" under German leadership.[224] The confederation would pursue a centralized foreign policy, and coordinate the militaries of the member states to defend their common borders from external threats.[225] Naumann avoided prescribing specific constitutional structures, but bluntly stated that the German Empire's disproportionate industrial

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[220] Friedrich Naumann, "Die Politik des Schützengrabens," *Die Hilfe*, no. 21 (1915): 468–70; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 7–8.
[221] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 7–8.
[222] Ibid., 164.
[223] Ibid., 4–9.
[224] Friedrich Naumann, "Mitteleuropäische Zukunftsgedanken," *Die Hilfe*, 1914, 445; Naumann, "Die Politik des Schützengrabens," 470; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 165.
[225] Friedrich Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," *Die Hilfe* 21 (April 8, 1915): 464–67; Friedrich Naumann, "Mitteleuropa und deutsche Weltpolitk: allgemeine Leitsätze," *Die Hilfe* 23, no. 2 (1917): 852.

capacity, military power, and superior organization would give it a leading role in *Mitteleuropa*.[226] However, Naumann also emphasized both the robust autonomy of member-states and tolerance of national diversity as essential to the harmonious unity and success of any confederation.[227] Aside from foreign policy, military command, and common tariff regulation, member states would retain complete control over their own domestic governance. *Mitteleuropa*, would have no jurisdiction over matters of confession, culture, language, nationality policy, or policing.[228] It was not to be a vehicle for Germanization.

Plans to forge a broad Central European confederation proved especially popular among German left liberals including leading publicists, politicians, and intellectuals like Paul Rohrbach, Ernst Jäckh, Friedrich Meinecke, Willy Hellpach, Walter Schotte, Gerhart von Schulz-Gävernitz, Freiherr von Mackay, and Max Seber.[229] The project also drew support from independent academics, like Friedrich Wilhelm Foester, a professor of Pedagogy at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, who submitted a memorandum to Berlin in support of a confederation.[230] The inclusion of Poland in *Mitteleuropa* similarly attracted support from German Catholic politicians and intellectuals, including prominent public endorsements from Julius Bachem.[231] The project's most ardent proponents, including the influential Paul Rohrbach and Friedrich Meinecke, joined Naumann in supporting a Central European confederation in the autumn of 1914. More threw their weight behind the project during and after Germany's successful eastern campaign in 1915

Naumann and other multinationalists came to understand Congress Poland as central, not incidental, to the success of this Central European confederation. Naumann's vision was capacious, and focused on uniting the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires. However, because Congress Poland's incorporation in *Mitteleuropa* would drastically reduce the length of the Confederation's eastern frontier with Russia, Naumann always considered Poland's inclusion a "chief priority" [*oberste Hauptfrage*] for Germany's war aims.[232] By August 1915 at the latest, Naumann had simply begun assuming that a restored Polish state would comprise the third major component of a Central European confederation.[233]

Some hoped that Congress Poland's central importance to both Austria-Hungary and Germany could be used as a political center of gravity to gradually entangle the two empires. Adolf Grabowsky proposed, in his December 1915 book, to erect a German-Austrian "condominium" in Congress Poland, wherein the two powers would exercise "common sovereignty" over the region through a viceroy.[234] Both empires would overtake military responsibilities for Polish territories adjacent to their own borders, and together guard

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[226] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 57.Germany's future leadership in foreign policy and military command was assumed by virtually all supporters of a multinational Central European Confederation. See especially: Willy Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (January 29, 1916): 133; Willy Hellpach, "Politische Gedanken über die deutsche Sprache," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 18, 1916): 371–78.

[227] Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," 467.

[228] Ibid.; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 232.

[229] Paul Rohrbach, "Mühlestein: ‚Deutschlands Sendung'," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 32 (November 1914): 965; Rohrbach, "Kriegspolitische Ausrichtung," 665; Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 78; Ernst Jäckh, "'Mitteleuropa' als Organismus," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (June 16, 1916): 1068–70; Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 684; Friedrich Meinecke, "Präliminarien der Kriegsziele," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 31 (July 31, 1915): 1001; Willy Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 8, 1915): 624–26; Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," 566; Hellpach, "Politische Gedanken über die deutsche Sprache," 371–78; Walther Schotte, "Kontinentalpolitik und Weltpolitik," *Die Hilfe*, April 20, 1916, 252; Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, "An der Schwelle des dritten Kriegsjahres," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (September 1, 1916): 1557–61; von Mackay, "Kriegsziele – Kriegserkenntnis II," 1268; Freiherr von Mackay, "Polen und Deutschland," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 5, no. 43 (December 1, 1916): 221; Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," 2155–61.

[230] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 169.

[231] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 13–14; Julius Bachem, "Das neue Polen," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 5, no. 42 (November 20, 1916): 173; von Nostitz-Rieneck, "Mitteleuropa," *Stimmen der Zeit* 92 (1916): 20–30; Obermans S.J., "Die Erfüllung der polnischen Sehnsucht," 388–90.

[232] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 100.

[233] Friedrich Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," *Die Hilfe* 31 (August 5, 1915): 482.

[234] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 89–90, 95.

Mitteleuropa's shortened eastern flank.[235] Grabowsky believed that a significant and "always-expanding" degree of Polish autonomy and "self-administration" would be essential to both entice Polish collaboration, and ultimately to stabilize the region.[236] On the national level, this would begin with the organization of a Polish "advisory council" to assist the viceroy, but would expand to include an "independent Polish parliament" with authority over all matter not pertaining to foreign and military policy.[237] Grabowsky favored condominium, not out of a desire to repress or marginalize Polish nationalists, but primarily to compel Berlin and Vienna to develop common institutions of Central European governance after the war. Grabowsky had little faith in the ability of the Hohenzollern and Habsburg Kaisers to improvise an effective and durable confederation in wartime. Rather, he proposed that Poland function as a "bridge" that would gradually bind the two states into a "unified *Mitteleuropa*".[238] Jointly administering this strategically vital region would require Berlin and Vienna to build common institutions to administer Polish finances, legislation, and common regional defense. These standing committees would gradually expand into the core organs of a Central European confederacy.[239]

Poland's high strategic value alternatively led some multinationalists to demand a direct German-Polish union within a larger Central European confederation. In the event that a larger confederation with Austria-Hungary miscarried, multinationalists like Georg Cleinow hoped this bilateral relationship would ensure that the vital German-Polish union would remain intact. Already by January 1915, Cleinow publicly supported the creation of an autonomous state in Congress Poland, and its integration into a "Central European society of states".[240] In a memorandum submitted to the Government General of Warsaw in June 1916, Cleinow still favored the creation of a Polish state which would guarantee the "cultural autonomy of the Poles". However, by this point Cleinow worried that Berlin and Vienna would be unable to arrange a durable confederation, and now recommended the creation of an autonomous Polish state "bound in permanent real-union with Prussia" as necessary for obtaining lasting security in the region.[241] Berlin would assume responsibility for Warsaw's foreign policy, and the Prussian Ministry of War would alone organize and coordinate the Polish army. Furthermore, Cleinow proposed that Berlin retain the right to inspect Poland's police services.[242] Prussia's institutional "real union with New Poland" would offer the "best guarantee" that the Polish executive and military would only serve Berlin's strategic interests, and never fall under foreign influence.[243] Cleinow still supported a broader Central European confederation, but prioritized the establishment of Germany's immediate suzerainty over Poland.[244] Cleinow was not alone in these doubts. By 1916, Paul Rohrbach described Poland as the "primary foundation of our future security against the Russian danger" and proposed a special bilateral constitutional relationship between Berlin and Warsaw.[245] Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster similarly suggested that the personal union of the Polish monarchy with a German federal dynasty would be necessary, though he hoped this would obtain within *Mitteleuropa*.[246]

Some scrapped the ambitious plans for Central European confederation altogether, and advocated only the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland under German Suzerainty. A memorandum presented by faculty at the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office in November 1915 offered the basic model for this

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[235] Ibid., 89–91.
[236] Ibid., 55–56, 91–93, 97.
[237] Ibid., 97.
[238] Ibid., 82–83.
[239] Ibid., 91–92.
[240] Georg Cleinow, "Die Zukunft Polens," *Die neue Rundschau*, January 1915, 117.
[241] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 46.
[242] Ibid., 82–84.
[243] Ibid., 86, 92–94.
[244] Ibid., 82–83.
[245] Paul Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 4, no. 28 (July 1, 1916): 13.
[246] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 168–69.

German-Polish union.[247] Authored jointly by Professor of Catholic Theology Johannes Nikel and Professor of Metallurgy Oskar Simmersbach, and undersigned by eight other members of the faculty, the Breslau memorandum called upon Berlin to construct a "broad border-wall to the east", by establishing a Polish state in close and permanent constitutional association with the German Empire.[248] The new Kingdom of Poland would enjoy sweeping autonomy. However as a "protectorate" of the German Empire, Berlin would direct a common foreign policy for the union and retain the "supreme command" over Poland's military forces, fortresses, and border defenses, taking responsibility for Germany's and Poland's collective security in the East.[249]

The left liberal politician Georg Gothein similarly proposed a German-Polish union, though far more ambitious in scale. Gothein first intoned his support for German Suzerainty over Poland in December 1914. He circumvented censorship by obliquely commenting on the genius of Karl Baron vom und zum Stein, the early 19th century Prussian reformer. Gothein winked to his readers that this "far-sighted statesman" had, a century before, already offered valuable comments on the Russian-Polish question that might help resolve Germany's current security dilemma in the east.[250] Gothein's Stein had believed that Poles "would be satisfied" with an autonomous constitutional existence, and would loyally serve any state that granted them such guarantees for their "individuality".[251] The visionary Stein, Gothein reported, had therefore proposed the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III simultaneously assume the Polish crown, and delegate the viceregency of the territory to an appropriate Polish Grandee.[252] Gothein conspicuously praised this proposal for fulfilling Polish expectations while simultaneously securing both Prussia and Poland from Russian aggression.[253] Over subsequent months, Gothein expanded the scale of his proposed German-Polish constitutional union. In early 1916, Gothein penned *The Autonomous Poland as a Multinational State*.[254] In this revised German-Polish union, Gothein recommended that Germany construct an "autonomous Polish-Lithuanian-Couronian state" from vast swathes of Russian territory, and incorporate it into permanent union with the German Empire, almost as a new federal state.[255] Most importantly, Gothein pressed, Berlin must conclude "military convention" with Poland-Lithuania-Curonia, on the model of that linking Bavaria with the North German Confederation between 1866 and 1871.[256]

Immediate German-Polish union likewise earned a host of vocal public supporters during the first two years of WWI, mainly from left-liberal circles. The left liberal historian Ignaz Jastrow, offered his own memorandum to the German occupation government in Warsaw, supporting multinational rule over Poland.[257] The progressive historian and publicist Hans Delbrück came to support German Suzerainty over Poland by August 1915 at the latest.[258] Indeed, Delbrück favored an extremely close relationship between Germany and Poland, fortified through personal union with Saxony's Wettin dynasty.[259] His more conservative student, and correspondent for *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Emil Daniels similarly suggested that a German-Polish union was a strategic necessity in mid 1916.[260] Max Weber also advocated the creation of a Polish

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[247] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 124.
[248] Ibid., 125–26.
[249] Ibid., 131.
[250] Georg Gothein, "Der Freiherr vom Stein über die Wiederherstellung Polens," *März* 8, no. 4 (December 1914): 193, 198.
[251] Ibid., 196.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid., 198.
[254] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 7.
[255] Ibid., 23–25.
[256] Ibid., 25.
[257] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 118–21.
[258] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 134–35; Hans Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga – das Königreich Polen. die Zivil-Dienstpflicht. der Regierungswechsel in Oesterreich-Ungarn," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, November 26, 1916, 86; Hans Delbrück, "Eine Richtigstellung," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, April 29, 1916, 240.
[259] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 135.
[260] Hildebrandt, "Polen und Deutschland," 107–12.

state under German Suzerainty in a October 1916 speech in Munich.[261] Finally, the conservative Historian and close supporter of Rohrbach's wartime policies in Russia, Theodor Schiemann, ultimately endorsed the restoration of a Polish state as a German client.[262]

Mitteleuropa and a German-Polish union differed in the scale of their ambitions, but aimed to resolve the same strategic problems through roughly the same methods of ethnic management. As doubts grew about the plausibility of such a Central European confederation, or the military efficacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, several prominent multinationalists quietly retreated from their support for *Mitteleuropa* and emphasized the importance of a more immediate German-Polish union. In August 1915, Axel Schmidt had still considered an Austro-Polish solution more likely to satisfy Polish wishes.[263] By December, Schmidt had shifted to a *mitteleuropäisch* position, calling for an "autonomous" Polish state in close association with the Central Powers.[264] By September of 1916, Axel Schmidt had again scaled-down his war aims, calling on Berlin to create an anti-Russian Polish state, in close association with the German Empire, which would form a "wall… which the Muscovian storm-surge cannot overwhelm".[265] Schmidt's close associate Paul Rohrbach had similarly entertained the Austro-Polish solution in July 1914.[266] By November, however, Rohrbach already argued that Germany's national "mission for the coming epoch" would be to create a new "Central European confederation of nations".[267] In July 1915, Rohrbach first explicitly advocated the inclusion of a restored Polish state allied with Germany as part of an anti-Russian phalanx.[268] In July of 1916, Rohrbach still hoped to incorporate Poland into a Central European confederation, but now signaled his openness to a special bilateral relationship between Poland and the German Empire.[269]

Friedrich Meinecke's preferences for the fate of Poland followed the same trajectory. In an August 1914 letter to his left liberal colleague, Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, Meinecke had initially suggested that the Austro-Polish solution was the most realistic solution for the Polish question.[270] Already by October 1914, he had shifted to supporting the incorporation of a restored Polish state into a Central European confederation under German leadership.[271] In June 1916, Meinecke reiterated his support for incorporating a Polish state into a federally organized Central European confederation, as the best method for securing both Poland and Germany.[272]

This narrowing focus shadowed the declining fortunes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serbia had bloodied the nose of the Austro-Hungarian armies in August 1914, an embarrassment quickly followed by disastrous Austrian campaigns in Galicia in September and October. Both Meinecke and Rohrbach abandoned their tolerance for an Austro-Polish solution in the immediate wake of these catastrophes. Rohrbach's suggestion of a narrower German-Polish bilateral relationship in July 1916 closely followed the Brusilov Offensive's penetration of the Austro-Hungarian lines in June. Schmidt's preference for a German-Polish union over a broader Central European confederation gelled as this same offensive wound down in September.

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[261] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 735–40.
[262] Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 32; Theodor Schiemann, "Streiflichter zur Weltlage XXI," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 23, 1916): 2137.
[263] Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," 1146.
[264] Axel Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (December 25, 1915): 1721–27.
[265] Axel Schmidt, "Russland und die Polenfrage," *Die Hilfe*, September 14, 1916, 602.
[266] Rohrbach, *Der Krieg und die deutsche Politik*, 81.
[267] Rohrbach, "Mühlestein: ‚Deutschlands Sendung'," 965.
[268] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 916.
[269] Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 6–13; Paul Rohrbach, "Polen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 17, 1916): 2014; Paul Rohrbach, "Das Kriegsziel im Schützengraben," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 4, 1916): 246; Rohrbach, "Kriegspolitische Ausrichtung," 665.
[270] Worried that an enlarged Austrian Poland would catalyze Prussian irredentism, he wrote that Berlin would need to accelerate the German colonization of its eastern frontier, and might need to expel Polish landowners from the area around Posen: Meinecke, "Letter to Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz, 30 August 1914," 198. Meinecke also discussed this option with Walter Goetz in 1915: Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.
[271] Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 684; Meinecke, "Präliminarien der Kriegsziele," 1001–5.
[272] Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," 566.

Repeated Austro-Hungarian defeats in 1914 first convinced German multinationalists first that Vienna could not be relied upon to guard the strategically vital territory of Congress Poland. Subsequent failures only encouraged German multinationalists to narrow the scope of their ambitions. As confederation with Austria-Hungary offered little apparent military value, multinationalists prioritized the more plausible, and urgent, project of binding Poland to the German Empire. Hans Delbrück's, Axel Schmidt's, and Paul Rohrbach's growing preference for German-Polish union over Central European confederations reveals two important facets of German Multinationalism. First, proponents tended to approach *Mitteleuropa* and a German-Polish union as similar multinational projects on different scales. Both rested on federal autonomy, and military-political centralization in Berlin. Secondly, multinationalists understood reliable control of Congress Poland as a Germany's top priority on the Eastern Front.

Even Germans who had previously worried about the threat of Polish nationalism to German integrity endorsed a multinational German-Polish union as the only plausible means for securing German objectives in Congress Poland. These reluctant multinationalists often proposed a hybrid solution, centered on the creation of an autonomous Polish-state under German suzerainty, but backstopped by "corrections" to Prussia's eastern frontier. These distinguished themselves from nationalizing projects in their refusal to support the aggressive Germanization of annexed territories. During the war Max Sering, the intellectual father of internal colonization, in principle espoused the "nationality principle" as the ideal foundation of states, and supported the "cleanest separation of national residential territories possible".[273] While Sering supported the annexation of a large strip of territory on the Bobr-Narew-Warthe line, he rejected Germanization through "compulsory expulsions" as "impossible".[274] Potentially fearing Poles' capacity to organize effective resistance, Sering appears to have consistently rejected this strategy for managing Polish space through 1916.[275] He hoped that Prussia might gradually Germanize the annexed territory, but restricted Berlin's role to encouraging voluntary Polish emigration through the sale of former Russian domains and crownlands.[276] After Germany's successful 1915 campaign, Sering quickly submitted a memo to the Foreign Office in support of multinational collaboration with an "autonomous Congress Poland" in "military union with Germany" as a means of extending Berlin's strategic influence eastward.[277] Sering mimicked more committed multinationalists by arguing that the German Empire could only achieve real security against Russia by trading Polish autonomy for their collaboration in such a German-Polish military union.[278] Breaking with his past activism, Sering admitted that necessary Polish collaboration with such a "Military- and infrastructural federation" would require considerable Polish "independence", affording Berlin control over only foreign policy and military command.[279] In 1916 he repeated his belief that, after granting "constitutional freedom", Poland would never "turn its weapons on its liberator" and that Poland would "comprise a firm border-wall against Russia".[280] "Military union" with Germany, he proclaimed, would permanently secure both the German Empire and the new Polish state.[281]

Germans publicly embraced a multinational German-Polish union above all because it appeared to offer the most efficient means of securing the German Empire. A reliable Polish state under German suzerainty promised to fortify the empire's position in Eastern Europe far more than piecemeal annexations, independence, or Austrian control ever could.[282] In effect,

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[273] Max Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 1916, 37, N30/35, BArch.
[274] Max Sering, "'Die Zukunft Polens', Second Memorandum," May 31, 1916, 42–43, N30/35, BArch.
[275] Several historians have claimed otherwise (Imanuel Geiss, for instance). I could find no evidence of this in either Sering's publications or memoranda from 1914-1916. Sering was willing to support expulsions and population exchanges to engineer a state's permanent control over a region, just not in Poland. Max Sering, "Letter to Undersecretary Zimmerman, 17 August 1915," August 17, 1915, 128, R21574, PA AA.
[276] Sering, "'Die Zukunft Polens', Second Memorandum," 43.
[277] Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 26; Sering, "Letter to Undersecretary Zimmerman, 17 August 1915," 127.
[278] Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 23.
[279] Ibid., 23–25; Sering, "'Die Zukunft Polens', Second Memorandum," 42.
[280] Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," 191.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 14.

German suzerainty would turn over control of the territory to Berlin, insulating Germany's eastern border while allowing German units to traverse and defend the borders of Congress Poland at will. With control of Congress Poland, Berlin would finally acquire the necessary "security of its flank" and an advanced operations zone [*Vorland*] in the event of war with its neighbors.[283] As Ignaz Jastrow noted, multinational union would permit Germany to "militarily organize Poland's eastern border", and allow Germany to "hold its border with Russia in firm and secure hands".[284] Multinationalists embraced German suzerainty because it redrew Germany's *practical* military frontier with Russia along the Bug River.[285] Aside from dramatically increasing the distance between frontier and imperial capital, German observers broadly agreed that this line was straighter, shorter, laden with natural obstacles and artificial fortifications, and altogether easier to defend.[286] The amputation of Poland would additionally carve away vital industrial raw materials, populations, and manufactories from the Russian economy.[287] Multinationalists believed that German suzerainty would achieve this "incomparable fortification of Germany against Russian expansion", without simultaneously provoking the unrest and resistance from Polish nationalists that would accompany annexations.[288]

On the contrary, the creation of an autonomous state in military and political union with the German Empire promised to transform the Polish population from a political vulnerability into a military asset. Multinationalists imagined units of the Polish army standing shoulder to shoulder with the armies of Imperial Germany as an impenetrable phalanx against Petrograd's ambitions. Gothein declared that a military convention with Poland would facilitate a "powerful organization of the military powers of the *new* empire" and reinforce a common "bulwark against the Russian danger".[289] The Polish army would make Polish manpower into a "new source of power" for the German Empire, rather than a perennial threat to eastern Prussian stability.[290] Indeed, multinationalists considered military collaboration an essential part of the grand German-Polish bargain. Poland's autonomous status, Naumann wrote, would be "predicated" upon "military-association" [*Heeresverband*] with a *mitteleuropäisch* confederation.[291] Hans Delbrück supported the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland not for its own sake, but because he was "certain", that Poland's armies would participate in the common defense of Europe from the return of "Muscovian rule".[292]

Indeed, the prospect of Polish military collaboration led many multinationalists to support the creation of an expanded, and militarily more capable, Polish state.[293] Many favored the eastward expansion of Poland's border, beyond the Bug line, and as far into White Ruthenia as peace negotiations could secure.[294] Expansion would reinforce the economic and demographic basis of the Polish state, allowing it to field a more powerful army alongside German units in the future.[295] It would also reduce the economic potential of the Russian Empire. Finally, the territory, covered in dense forests and hemmed in by the almost impenetrable Pripyat Marshes, was considered just as defensible, perhaps even more so, than the more westerly Bug line. Gothein offered by far the most ambitious program for Polish expansion, recommending that all of Lithuania, Courland, and parts of White Ruthenia augment Congress Poland.[296] This sweeping Polish state would defend, under German leadership, a short and defensible frontier, shielded in

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[283] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 46–37, 74, 90.
[284] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 121.
[285] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 127.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid., 126–34.
[288] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 169.
[289] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 25.
[290] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 131.
[291] Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," 894.
[292] Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga," 86.
[293] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 3.
[294] Rüdiger, "Polnische Blätter," *Die Hilfe*, January 13, 1916, 34.
[295] Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 25.
[296] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 14.

the north by the Daugava River and by either the Pripyat Marshes or Bug redoubt in the South.[297] Rohrbach did not support the turnover of Lithuania to Warsaw, but still argued fervently that expanding a Polish state under German suzerainty "as far to the east against Moscow as possible", represented the best "guarantee for the future of Germandom".[298] As an indirect bolster to German regional power, Delbrück likewise encouraged a "Polish drive to the East" [*Drang der Polen nach Osten*].[299] Even Max Sering, the intellectual father of internal colonization, favored expanding a client Polish state beyond the Bug, into parts of the Grodno, Minsk, and Wilna governorates.[300] Sympathetic Polish authors further tantalized German readers, suggesting that the colonization, Polonization, and economic development of such a region would consume the energies of Polish nationalists in the future, who would gradually abandon their claims on the Prussian *Ostmark*.[301]

However, the success of a German-Polish union relied on the willingness of Poles to accept the imperial structure as legitimate, and actively collaborate with Berlin in perpetuity. Those Germans who embraced multinational imperialism did so in the belief that Polish nationalists would recognize that the German Empire and Polish nation had a common interest in jointly defending a solid eastern frontier from Russian aggression. Multinationalists believed that Poles would loyally serve their German Suzerain as the best means of ensuring their own national future. As much as they understood Polish national identity as practically immutable, German multinationalists all postulated that the political content of Polish nationalism was flexible, and could be effectively managed and manipulated from Berlin.

Prussia proved quite able to mobilize its Polish-speaking populations for military service in the early years of the war. Mobilization in August 1914 proceeded without major disturbance or resistance from Prussia's 3.5 million Poles.[302] Scattered reports complained of Polish men avoiding the draft, or requiring Police compulsion to serve.[303] But local reports from eastern Prussia also indicated that Poles were presenting themselves for voluntary enlistment.[304] Throughout the war, Berlin would manage to conscript 850,000 Polish speakers into the Prussian army. 6% of all men who served under the imperial flags spoke Polish as their first language.[305] Moreover, Polish conscripts acquitted themselves well in combat. Polish units could sustain heaving casualties without wavering.[306] The 18 Polish representatives in the Reichstag matched this loyalty by voting unanimously for war credits in 1914. Poles' conscientious fulfillment of their civil military duties dramatically refuted nationalist warnings of Polish treachery.

German multinationalists were quick to emphasize this loyalty as ironclad proof that Poles could be reliable supporters of a German imperial system.[307] Already in 1914, Meinecke concluded that Poles had demonstrated their commitment to the Prussian state by taking up arms to defend it.[308] In January 1915, one author mocked earlier predictions that Poles for revolt against Berlin. He pointed gleefully to the unanimous Polish vote for war credits, and claimed that Poles had "not only willingly followed the call for the defense of their Fatherland, but had also reported to volunteer in large numbers".[309] Naumann recounted with satisfaction that the "foreign-

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[297] Ibid.
[298] Paul Rohrbach, *Russland und wir* (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1916), 73; Rohrbach, "Polen," 2014; Paul Rohrbach, "Russisches," 1915, 60, R1501/119780, BArch.
[299] Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga," 85.
[300] Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," 191.Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 36.
[301] Wilhelm Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (August 14, 1915): 1074.
[302] Jones, "The German Empire," 56.
[303] Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96.
[304] Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* CXXVI, no. 522 (2011): 1142.
[305] Ibid., 1137; Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela, "Introduction," in *Empires at War, 1911-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.
[306] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1146.
[307] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 5.
[308] Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 683.
[309] Franz Kolbe, "Unfähigkeit der deutschen Dipolmatie," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (January 9, 1915): 38.

language components of our empire" also "stand bravely and tenaciously" to defend Germany in war.[310] For Naumann, the Polish loyalty in the German Empire openly refuted the claims of the *Ostmarkenverein* and Pan-German League, and simultaneously proved that state loyalty could mobilize ethnically diverse populations.[311] Emil Daniels likewise expressed his admiration for Polish Prussians who, despite Berlin's past Germanization efforts, had opted "to declare the cause of the Central Powers as their own, without reservation".[312] German multinationalists pointed to Polish loyalism as proof that Poles would loyally serve a German imperial structure, and to quiet concerns that a Polish state would invariably betray its German suzerain.[313]

Adolf Grabowsky argued that Poles' deportment during mobilization reflected the honor and loyalty central to Polish national character, and had finally dispelled nationalist accusations of Polish "Wallenrodism".[314] The term refers to Adam Mickiewicz's "Konrad Wallenrod", an 1828 poem about a pagan Lithuanian who joins the Teutonic Order, steadily rises to the position of Grandmaster, and then dramatically betrays Germanic crusaders by deliberately leading an army to defeat in Lithuania. German nationalists had often cited this poem to insinuate that Poles were culturally predisposed to conspire against and betray their imperial masters.[315] Grabowsky contended that Mickiewicz's poem was exceptional, and more importantly, "politically, completely inconsequential".[316] Wallenrodism failed to gain purchase in Polish literary and political culture, Grabowsky argued, because it contravened Poland's true national values.[317] He concluded that if Germany worked to build and defend Polish autonomy, and treated its Polish nationals reasonably, than it need not fear future treachery. Polish nationals could be expected to work honorably with the German Empire, in pursuit of their mutual interests.[318]

Alexander Guttry offered one of the more vehement assertions of Polish loyalism. Despite their wretched treatment by the Prussian government and German nationalists, Guttry praised Polish Germans for maintaining, "in every respect, worthy conduct", fighting bravely through the long years of the war.[319]

> The Poles have fully and completely fulfilled their duty as Prussian subjects. A flock of volunteers [and] numerous donations for the war effort prove, that they have done more, than one expected from the German side.[320]

Even as they continue to defend and practice their national culture, Guttry continued, Poles had proven conclusively their readiness to carry out their imperial duties.[321] In one "world-historical moment" of conflict, "all the justifications for anti-Polish policy" had suddenly "crumbled, powerless and without substance".[322]

This assessment of Polish service permeated German discourse during the first years of WWI. Indeed, such uniform and unassailable loyalism caught anti-Polish organizations flat-footed and threatened to discredit their carefully built narrative of Polish treachery. Nationalist authors and organizations like the *Ostmarkenverein* rushed to somehow deny Poles' obvious loyalty. On the 18 of August, 1914, Leo Wegener submitted a memorandum to the German government, urging Berlin not to depart from its pre-war Polish policy. Even he had to admit, that Poles had dispatched their duties. Wegener therefore spent his efforts inventing creative

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[310] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 33.
[311] Ibid., 74–75.
[312] Emil Daniels, "Die Polen," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, April 1915, 159.
[313] Ibid., 160.
[314] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 57–58.
[315] Ibid., 58.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid., 58–59.
[319] von Guttry, *Die Polen und der Weltkrieg*, XVII.
[320] Ibid., XVIII.
[321] Ibid., XIX.
[322] Ibid.

reasons for why mobilization did not actually reflect genuine Polish loyalty to Berlin.[323] In the absence of any major incidents of Polish disruption, Wegener simply asserted, with no evidence, that Poles would have likely obstructed mobilization, had wartime restrictions on rail and telegraphy traffic into Posen not isolated Polish national organizations.[324] The first wartime issue of *Die Ostmark* similarly felt compelled to address rumors, "spread by a number of papers", that Poles' "commendable" service had so disproven the central assumption of the *Ostmarkenverein*, that its executive board had opted simply to shutter its operations.[325] The editorial staff of course angrily denied the rumor, but otherwise seemed confounded as to how to justify their position.

On 26 November 1914, the executive board of the *Ostmarkenverein* sent a memorandum to the Foreign Office, the bulk of which struggled to prove that Prussian Poles secretly harbored disloyal attitudes.[326] They too had to admit that "Poles liable for military service have willingly followed the call to the banners, and that many of them have fought , and still fight, dutifully and courageously".[327] They even conceded that "directly anti-German statements, such as the wish that Russia might invade the province or that the fortress of Posen might be besieged by the Russians, indeed occur, but only rarely".[328] Unable to prove widespread Polish treason, *Ostmarkenverein* leaders instead complained about a lack of "enthusiasm" for the war among Poles.[329] They concentrated on unverifiable signals of Polish subversion, accusing Poles of insufficiently celebrating German victories. They further suspected that Polish men were not volunteering for service at the same rates as their German counterparts, but here even they admitted that they had no proof.[330] A subsequent *Ostmarkenverein* memorandum, submitted to the foreign office by Otto Hoetzsch in December 1914, struggled to explain why the "Prussian Poles stand themselves loyally by the German flag".[331] Yet Hoetzsch quickly claimed that this loyalty was fragile, and urged Berlin to accelerate its Germanization efforts in the east during the war.[332]

Frequently nationalist diatribes barely bothered to describe Poles as a serious national threat, and attempted only to downplay the magnitude of Polish service. Dietrich Schäfer dismissed Polish service because it was compulsory, and expected of any Prussian subject.[333] This became a prominent theme, echoed by anti-Polish writers in the first two years of the war: Polish loyalty was merely expected and compulsory, and did not justify any political concessions. Nationalist polemicists were on the defensive in the early years of the war, as they attempted to demonstrate the continued relevance of their anti-Polish position.[334]

German multinationalists also believed the political atmosphere in Congress Poland offered fertile ground for the creation of a Polish national kingdom within a German imperial structure. They argued that Polish Russians harbored deep resentment towards Petrograd as a result of its past Russification efforts and repressive crackdowns on Polish political activity. They firmly believed that Congress Poles considered the Russian Empire an existential threat to their national culture and concluded that Russian Poles would accept German Suzerainty as necessary to defend themselves from Russian aggression in the future.

These hopes were not baseless. Polish Russians indeed suffered from a regime of legal discrimination, which had produced widespread disaffection with Petrograd. In January 1863, Russian-Polish tensions had spilled over into armed Polish revolt in both Congress Poland and

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[323] Bernhard Wegener, "Die Ostgrenze," August 18, 1914, 2, N30/34, BArch.
[324] Ibid.
[325] "An unsere Mitglieder," *Die Ostmark*, December 1914, 77.
[326] Ostmarkenverein, "Report to the Foreign Office Regarding the Deportment of Prussian Poles, 26 November 1914," November 26, 1914, 2–30, R21655, PA AA.
[327] Ibid., 5.
[328] Ibid., 6.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 12.
[332] Ibid., 32.
[333] Schäfer, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," 111; Schäfer, "Deutschland und der Osten," 8.
[334] Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," 239.

the Western Provinces[*].[335] Russia was able to suppress the rebellion, but the insurrection convinced St. Petersburg that Polish fantasies of political restoration, constituted an urgent threat to Russian integrity.[336] Poles' wielded considerable economic and political influence in the western Russian Empire, making them a powerful adversary in the eyes of St. Petersburg.[337] After 1863, Russian policy sought to politically marginalize Polish elites and undermine their economic clout in order to dismantle the influence of Polish nationalism.[338] Already during the suppression of the revolt, Russian officials targeted Polish nobles and Catholic clergy as "irreconcilable enemies" of the Russian state, and confiscated gentry estates and Catholic monasteries for redistribution to ethnic Russians.[339]

The Russian Empire introduced severe measures of political repression meant to quarantine local levers of power from the influence of Polish nationalism. St. Petersburg thoroughly purged Polish bureaucrats from the imperial administration, replaced them with ethnic Russian civil servants, and excluded Poles' from all but the most humble government positions.[340] Fearing that Polish nationalists might infiltrate any representative institutions, Russia refrained from introducing *zemstva* institutions of local self-government, to the Vistula Provinces and the Western Provinces.[341] Because of their strategic value, the Vistula Provinces were subjected to yet more stringent standards of censorship.[342] Additionally, Congress Poles were denied the privilege of trial by jury, even after this innovation had been introduced elsewhere in the Russian judiciary.[343]

St. Petersburg also introduced restrictive land policies designed to subvert the economic influence of Polish nobles and landowners.[344] In 1865, St. Petersburg, began systematically forbidding Polish subjects to purchase new properties in the Western Provinces.[345] Soon Russia levied additional taxes on Polish landowners in the region to encourage them to sell their current parcels.[346] Nominal Russian landholdings in the western provinces thus grew substantially in the late 19th century at the cost of Polish landownership.[347] Shortly before the war, the Russian government began quietly inserting language into the incorporation documents of new businesses, which barred Jews and Poles from management or ownership.[348]

St. Petersburg simultaneously aimed to dismantle Polish cultural institutions.[349] Polish universities in Vilnius and Warsaw, seen as hotbeds of anti-Russian conspiracy, were shuttered. The university in Warsaw was reopened in 1869 as the Imperial University of Warsaw, with Russian as the language of instruction.[350] This was the capstone of a larger effort to Russify education in Polish regions. St. Petersburg expanded the number of Russian and orthodox schools, and replaced Polish instructors with imported Russian teachers.[351] In Congress Poland, a

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[*] The "western provinces" refer to the 9 governorates of the Russian Empire comprising land that had been annexed from the former Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. They differed from Congress Poland, which eventually became the 10 "Vistula provinces" in two ways. First, though Poles occupied many positions of social influence in these regions, demographically, they were considered less ethnically "Polish" than Congress Poland. Secondly, unlike Congress Poland, the western provinces were never granted autonomous status following the Congress of Vienna. The two regions would continue to differ in administrative structure for the duration of the Empire.

[335] Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 96.
[336] Ibid., 73, 93.
[337] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 56.
[338] Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 12–14.
[339] Ibid., 8, 97–98.
[340] Ibid., 77.
[341] Ibid., 17.
[342] Ibid., 81.
[343] Ibid., 101.
[344] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 87.
[345] Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 71, 98.
[346] Ibid., 99.
[347] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 87.
[348] Ibid., 60.
[349] Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 96.
[350] Ibid., 100.
[351] Ibid., 98.

1866 statute introduced a thoroughly Russian curriculum into education.[352] In the Western Provinces, Russian replaced Polish for all official and public use. Even shop signs were required to advertise the store in Russian first, and in larger lettering, before smaller Polish information could be provided.[353]

Unsurprisingly, politically active Poles grew increasingly disaffected with St. Petersburg. By 1914, demands for autonomy were ubiquitous in Polish-Russian political circles.[354] Conversely support for loyalism was precarious. In the wake of 1863, many Poles had adopted a strategy of "reconciliation" [*Ugoda*], hoping to trade loyalty to the unshakeable Tsarist regime for concessions on cultural policy.[355] The accession of Nicholas II to the throne in 1894 briefly fanned the hopes of these "Realists". However, with growing doubts about the Tsar's willingness to grant cultural or political concessions, Poles, especially young Poles, had abandoned *Ugoda* as a self-abasing and futile strategy.[356] By 1914, the "Realist" political orientation, had lost considerable ground and drew support mainly from conservative landowners and nobles.

As patience for *Ugoda* evaporated, Russian Poles had gravitated towards the nationalist mass political movements emerging in the late 19th century. Though lacking any legal representation or organization, Polish Socialism had begun to mobilize Congress Poland's growing body of industrial workers and urban intellectuals. Polish socialists, especially those organized under the banner of Józef Piłsudski's Polish Socialist Party (PPS), strongly favored complete independence from the Russian Empire. The rival National Democrats, or "Endeks", managed to effectively mobilize Russian Poles and dominated Polish legal politics after the opening of the Duma in 1906.[357] The party committed itself to Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism, but did not stray into open opposition to Tsarist rule. Under the leadership of Roman Dmowski, Endecja vocally opposed the wave of strikes, terrorist acts, and peasant disturbances that signaled the onset of revolution in 1905, and continued to accept St. Petersburg's authority.[358] However, this loyalism was tenuous and as the Tsar began to roll-back reforms in 1907, Dmowski's conciliatory leadership perturbed many in the Endek ranks.[359]

German multinationalists studied the political climate of Congress Poland in the early years of WWI, and concluded that decades of Russification had thoroughly alienated Polish subjects from Petrograd. Polish authors from Prussia and Austria-Hungary claimed that Polish support for the Russian Empire was far more tenuous than the boisterous loyalism of Dmowski suggested. These authors framed the Endeks as embattled and internally divided over the question of loyalism. Wilhelm Feldman, a Polish-speaking publicist from Krakow, contended that Russia had waged a "war of extermination" against Polish culture for decades.[360] Censorship had made a "small clique" of loyalists appear to represent the whole spectrum of Polish politics.[361] Poles, he argued, did not trust Tsarist promises of autonomy, and even the main press organ of Dmowski's movement had publicly written against Russia's pretension to act as a *primus inter pares* of the Slavic world.[362] Feldman wrote frequently on Russia's apparent failure to mobilize Polish genuine Polish support for the war effort.[363] Although Russia had conscripted Poles to fight in its armies, he argued that Poles' "free deeds", such as deserting "into the woods" or joining anti-Tsarist "Polish militias", better represented their political attitudes.[364] He noted especially Józef Piłsudski's success in recruiting and organizing secret military organizations to renew

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[352] Ibid., 100.
[353] Ibid., 99.
[354] Ibid., 114.
[355] Ibid., 113.
[356] Ibid., 113–14.
[357] Ibid., 114.
[358] Ibid., 115.
[359] Ibid., 116.
[360] Wilhelm Feldman, "Die polnische Frage," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 36 (1914): 1100.
[361] Wilhelm Feldman, "Politische Strömungen in Warschau," *Die Hilfe*, January 28, 1915, 58.
[362] Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," 1070–73.
[363] Feldman, "Die polnische Frage," 1101.
[364] Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," 1074; Wilhelm Feldman, "Zu Naumann's Ausführung über die Polenfrage," *Die Hilfe*, January 13, 1916, 27.

armed resistance against Petrograd, and Congress Poles' enlistment in Austria's Polish Legion.[365] Feldman argued that Polish Socialism's demand for independence reflected Polish wishes more authentically than Endecja.[366]

German multinationalist assessments of the political climate in Russian Poland mirrored Feldman's. Indeed, multinationalists routinely cited Feldman's opinions on politics in Congress Poland to demonstrate the receptivity of Russian Poles to collaboration with the German Empire. They broadly agreed that most loyalism or Russophilia in Congress Poland was either marginal or a momentary façade, hollowed out by decades of Russification, and masking wider and more authentic disdain for the Russian Empire. *Die Hilfe* quoted Polish authors, who argued that memories of the "Tsarist Lash", and the St. Petersburg's revocation of the 1815 constitution, made Poles unwilling to trust Petrograd's more recent promises of reform.[367] Alexander von Guttry similarly concluded that, "The Poles have felt the Russian lash too powerfully", to believe that Russian hegemony in the future could mean anything but the "complete Russification" of the Polish nation.[368]

In August 1914, Rohrbach believed that a "lust for insurrection" saturated Congress Poland and predicted the immanent "military and political collapse of the Russians in Poland".[369] The coming weeks, he claimed, would bring word of passive and active resistance to military mobilization in Russia, led by workers and Poles.[370] This proved to be wishful thinking. Yet Rohrbach remained undeterred and maintained that Poles were vehemently anti-Russian. Writing in 1915, Rohrbach dismissed the absence of a popular revolt against Russian oppression. It was natural and prudent, he admitted, for Poles to refrain from insurrection, especially when Russian army units already occupied Congress Poland.[371] A more reliable indicator of Polish opinion, Rohrbach insisted, was the poor reception of the Russian promises of autonomy. Many Poles, he argued, simply no longer trusted Petrograd's assurances of political concessions and postwar self-government.[372] By contrast, Rohrbach emphasized that "many Poles" had "enthusiastically" supported Austria-Hungary, and that "others even fought on the Prussian side".[373]

Axel Schmidt also believed that Polish dissatisfaction with Tsarism was apparent long after August 1914. Schmidt admitted that, for some nationalists disenchanted by past revolutions, Russian sponsorship at least promised to reassemble the pieces of the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth within a single state.[374] Yet he insisted that Polish Russophilia was mainly a reactionary phenomenon, led by Polish landowners and industrialists seeking Tsarist patronage to defend their interests against the rapidly growing urban working class.[375] Under this façade of vocal Pro-Russian elites, Schmidt believed the masses of Congress Poland were either indifferent or hostile to the Russian "oppressors of the Polish state".[376] Throughout 1915, Schmidt's publications emphasized that neither Polish nationalists nor Russian officials really believed Russo-Polish reconciliation to be a realistic goal.[377] He quoted Polish sources admitting the "impossibility of a Polish state under the Russian scepter" and warning that any autonomy would "disappear" through exceptional legislation.[378]

German multinationalists also believed that the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive had

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[365] Feldman, "Die polnische Frage," 1101–2.
[366] Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," 1073; Feldman, "Politische Strömungen in Warschau," 58.
[367] Sigismond Gargas, "Russisches Spiel in Polen," *Die Hilfe*, December 24, 1914, 851.
[368] von Guttry, *Die Polen und der Weltkrieg*, 295–97.
[369] Paul Rohrbach, "Unsere Gegner," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 15, 1914): 546; Paul Rohrbach, "Der Verlauf des Krieges," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 22, 1914): 566–67.
[370] Rohrbach, "Der Verlauf des Krieges," 568.
[371] Rohrbach, "Russisches," 51.
[372] Rohrbach, "Russisches."
[373] Ibid., 37.
[374] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1724.
[375] Ibid., 1723.
[376] Ibid., 1721.
[377] Ibid., 1726.
[378] Schmidt, "Die polnische Frage," 1143–44.

measurably changed political attitudes in Congress Poland. Rohrbach believed that the route of Russia's imperial armies had shattered Pole's remaining confidence in the regime, and convinced them of "how incomparably better the Germans are led".[379] After 1915, it appeared that only Berlin and Vienna were in any position to advance Polish interests. In consequence Schmidt believed that Polish Russophilism was unraveling at the seams, with even Roman Dmowski quietly distancing himself from Petrograd.[380] Polish politicians, he relayed, demanded a growing list of political concessions from the Russian Empire for their continued loyalty. With Poles jumping ship, Schmidt saw an opportunity for Berlin to permanently win over Polish nationalists by fulfilling their demands for autonomy and national self-governance.

This perception of Polish Russophobia continued to grow throughout 1915 and 1916. In January 1916, the editorial staff of *Deutsche Politik* twice reprinted a report from the Italian Social Democratic paper *Avantic*, with apparent relish. The article described the widespread rejection of Russia's promises of autonomy by its Polish subjects.

> In consideration of the arbitrariness, which Russia practiced against Finnish autonomy, it cannot be surprising that the Poles have considered the promises made to them with suspicion, and have concluded that vital [*lebenskräftig*] autonomy is impossible for them under Russian sovereignty. The miserable impressions of the rapes in Galizia, of the systematic devastation of all territories by the Russian Army, have contributed much to this conviction, which now permeates everywhere.[381]

Hans Delbrück essentially agreed with this assessment, writing that decades of Russification had disabused Poles of any faith in Tsarist promises of reform.[382] By 1916, multinationalists believed that military catastrophe, mismanagement, and empty promises had only hardened Polish resentment towards Russia. The "foreign nations" of Russia, Gothein argued, harbored no "patriotism" for an empire, which had so "disenfranchised" and "repressed" them.[383]

Multinationalists probably overestimated the degree of anti-Tsarism sentiment actually current in Congress Poland in the early war. Like Germany and Austria-Hungary, Russia mobilized its Polish population largely without incident. As nationalist critics were quick to point out, the touted invasion of Congress Poland by Austria's Polish Legion had failed to spark a popular insurrection, and had indeed encountered hostility from locals. The reality of Polish attitudes probably lay somewhere in the middle. Certainly vehement support for both Russian loyalism and anti-imperial insurrection existed in Congress Poland. The majority of the Polish population likely harbored some grievances towards the imperial government in Petrograd, but many probably felt indifferent towards Polish nationalist politics or even their identities as Poles. The majority of Congress Poland's population was still rural, mostly illiterate, and probably ambivalent politics beyond the boundaries of village and field. Regardless of whatever frustrations Congress Poles had with Petrograd, the vast majority of the population adopted a position of quiet, if unenthusiastic, loyalism to the Russian empire.

Yet the very fact that German forces had not encountered widespread native resistance sufficed to encourage German multinationalist hopes for Polish collaboration. A vocal faction of multinationalists admitted frankly that they suspected Congress Poles of harboring at least some sympathy for the Russian Empire. Writers like Axel Schmidt and Georg Cleinow suspected that Poland's rural population and urban proletariat were probably mainly ambivalent about Russian rule.[384] Certainly they acknowledged the PPS, and its efforts to organize resistance to the Tsar, but

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[379] Rohrbach, "Russisches," 51.
[380] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1725.
[381] "Notizen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (January 7, 1916): 94.
[382] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 132.
[383] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 12.
[384] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1723.

believed that reflexive wartime patriotism more than balanced this faction.[385] Grabowsky and Cleinow both cautioned their readers to take populist Endek nationalism seriously, and recognize it as broadly indicative of political attitudes in the region.[386] Cleinow quoted Polish nationalist brochures at length, warning his readers that associations like the *Macierz Szkolna* and Endecja had popularized disdain for Germans as "distrustful" and predatory, and interested in the "complete eradication" of Polish culture.[387] Skeptical multinationalists also suspected that Polish elites would be reluctant to break with Petrograd, and certainly showed little "direct German-friendly sympathies".[388] Poland's industrialists, merchants, and large landowners all relied on the vast Russian hinterland as a market for Polish goods, and simultaneously feared that the collapse of Russian autocracy would entail the redistribution of wealth and property.[389] While Poles might grumble under Tsarist rule, Cleinow and Grabowsky considered Russian loyalism remarkably robust.[390] The German Empire, they cautioned, should not count on the widespread and enthusiastic support of Congress Poles, at least not until after Russia had been thoroughly defeated.[391]

Yet multinationalists like Axel Schmidt, Georg Cleinow, and Adolf Grabowsky also considered Russian loyalism surmountable. They insisted that Berlin could redirect the energies and ambitions of Polish nationalism to German ends by developing policies to win over Polish social and intellectual elites. In bold text, Gothein described his prophetic Freiherr von Stein supporting "a policy of reconciliation: the national powers and identity [of Poles] shall not be repressed, but rather steered and directed towards mutual [German-Polish] objectives".[392] Most multinationalists assumed that access to German markets and Berlin's provision of autonomy after the war would naturally reconcile Polish elites with German Suzerainty, and form the basis for a broader "rapproachment" between the German and Polish nations.[393] Others focused on deliberate political strategies. Axel Schmidt considered the support of the Polish Catholic episcopate indispensible to Berlin's influence in the region. Schmidt suspected that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Poland, after decades of discrimination and meddling from Orthodox Petrograd, thoroughly disdained the Russian Empire.[394] If liberated, Schmidt believed, the Catholic episcopate and lower clergy would turn openly on the Russian state, and disseminate similar anti-Russian attitudes among the faithful masses.[395] Schmidt frankly stated his belief that Polish nationalist sentiment could be effectively channeled, with relative ease and little direct intervention. In 1915, he praised the German occupation government's decision to reopen local theatres and allow Poles to stage plays hitherto banned by Russian censors.[396] "It was thereby shown vividly, to all of the Poles," he wrote, "that their whole history and literature has recognized only the struggle against the Russian hereditary enemy [*Erbfeind*]".[397] By removing the constraints of Russian censorship, Schmidt believed that the German Empire could reshape the symbols and narratives of Polish nationalism, and redirect its political energies.

Several proponents of multinational rule developed more active strategies for winning the collaboration of Polish elites. Georg Cleinow recommended that Berlin undertake three ambitious policies after the war to "redirect" [*ablenken*] Polish nationalism into an anti-Russian

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[385] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 44–45; Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 74.
[386] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 43, 45; Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 46; Cleinow, "Die Zukunft Polens," 116.
[387] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 56–58.
[388] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 131.
[389] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 41; Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 74.
[390] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 46.
[391] Cleinow, "Die Zukunft Polens," 117.
[392] Gothein, "Der Freiherr vom Stein," 196.
[393] Hillebrandt and Nikel, "Memorandum from the University of Breslau," 131.
[394] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1724.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid., 1726.
[397] Ibid.

and Pro-German direction.[398] First, Cleinow agreed that Berlin should legitimate the postwar Polish state by supporting its expansion into White Ruthenia.[399] Simultaneously, Cleinow insisted that Berlin direct the drafting of the new Polish constitution to encourage the "development of the conservative, state-reinforcing, qualities of the Polish nation… through schools, associational life, and economic organizations".[400] Like Schmidt, Cleinow insisted that Berlin quickly recruit the Catholic Church and Christian labor unions to endorse the cause of German leadership within this autonomous Polish state.[401] Finally, Cleinow proposed an expensive program of railway and infrastructure development in Congress Poland. This would not only serve Germany's strategic interests in the region, but also employ, train, and pension thousands of Polish bureaucrats, engineers, and workers. In doing so it would, Cleinow reasoned, habituate the Polish professional class to thinking of their new state as legitimate, and to consider German multinational leadership as a guardian against Russia.[402]

For this faction of multinationalists, the contemporary attitudes of the Congress Polish population mattered less than Germany's ability to manipulate national sentiment after the war. They believed that Berlin would be able to do this with relative ease, through policies that carefully targeted relatively small cadres of Poland's social, administrative, and spiritual elites. The broader population, they contended, would follow their nationalist leaders in short order. Both left liberals, like Georg Gothein and Axel Schmidt, as well as pronounced conservatives like Adolf Grabowsky and Georg Cleinow subscribed to this view. This should come as no surprise, as this understanding of Polish nationalism closely paralleled the domestic politics of both groups. German left liberals understood national identity as a fundamentally transactional loyalty. They considered political loyalty more reliant on an implied social contract than ethnic heritage. Much as they advocated for domestic social programs to reinforce working class commitment to the German Empire, left liberals firmly believed that Berlin could buy Polish loyalty with autonomy and collective security. Moderate conservatives, inclined to believe that the German masses could, indeed must, be led by their intellectual and social superiors, similarly thought that Polish national politics would be pliable to Berlin's influence, through elite intermediaries. To some degree, all German multinationalists shared this foundational assumption. Multinationalists believed that, while national identity was largely fixed, the historical narratives and political content of such an identity could be altered to fit German purposes. They subscribed to a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism, believing that political, religious, and social elites wielded enormous power to shape the political attitudes of a national community, that they could proficiently wield energies of the national demos, and direct them towards their own ends. As a result, multinationalists believed that the German Empire need only win the collaboration of these national elites, and the Polish nation as a whole would follow. This would make Polish collaboration with a German imperial system possible and attainable, even if Congress Poles were not presently willing supporters of the Central Powers.

However most multinationalists were still convinced that Poles would welcome the creation of a new Polish state, and the end of Russian sovereignty.[403] The belief that most of Russia's national minorities, including Poland, Finnland, and Ukraine, sought liberation from the "bondage" and "lash of Tsarism", structured Paul Rohrbach's foreign policy in the early years of the war.[404] In a memo circulated in the Foreign Office, Rohrbach insisted that the Russian Empire roiled the "enmity of repressed nationalities against the ruling Great-Russian nation", and that Poles harbored mounting frustrations with Petrograd's arbitrary police actions, policies of Russification, and the growing influence of Russian nationalists in the imperial government.[405] The 25,000 volunteers of the Polish Legion proved, one author proclaimed, that Poles would

[398] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen Für Die Lösung Des Polnischen Problems," 76-78.
[399] Ibid.
[400] Ibid., 81.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid., 84.
[403] Jakob Obermans S.J., "Napoleon in Polen," *Stimmen der Zeit* 89 (1915): 561–62.
[404] Paul Rohrbach, "Deutschland als Befreier," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 19, 1914): 693–700.
[405] Rohrbach, "Russisches," 36.

"rather die than fall under Russian domination" again.[406] Hans Delbrück put it similarly, describing Poles as the "mortal enemies" [*Todfeinde*] of Pan-slavism.[407]

Multinationalists likewise insisted that a Polish state, ceded from the Russian Empire, would require German strategic patronage to survive. Congress Poland, they argued, sat squarely between the great empires of East Central Europe, with few natural obstacles along its borders to hinder foreign aggression. Across the spectrum, multinationalists argued that Congress Poland was simply too small, and geographically exposed, to defend itself in the future, and that a Polish state would necessarily rely on the German Empire to deflect Russian imperialism.[408] "Without secure borders to the East and West" one author wrote bluntly, Poland faced a stark choice.[409] It could either choose to be an "Outpost of the West against the East", or it could surrender to Russian dominance.[410] From 1914 until the end of 1916, multinationalists insisted that only union with the German Empire, or at least robust military collaboration, could preserve the autonomy of a new Polish state, from the "return of Russian mismanagement".[411]

Observers like Naumann and Rohrbach believed that the scale of modern conflict made Poland's dependence on a foreign state inevitable. Observers like Rohrbach argued that global empires had fundamentally altered the scale of the international order, effectively concentrating power in the hands of three great "world states" [*Weltstaaten*]. In 1912 he predicted that, "In the future, the smaller people will need to decide with which of the great nations they will voluntarily combine…".[412] When war arrived in 1914, Rohrbach quickly concluded that Poland and Germany both required military union to secure their interests from Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Similarly, Naumann argued that "small states" simply could no longer survive industrial-scale conflicts, especially if they were situated, like Poland in one of the "military routes of the great nations" into Central Europe.[413] Poland, he wrote, was an "in-between nation", sandwiched between the immense powers of Germany and Russia, and not "strong enough to sustain their own political independence, but able to assist or hinder both sides".[414] Naumann suspected that Poles had realized this, and that no Pole genuinely believed that an independent Polish state could survive.[415] To avoid becoming a "lost nation", Poland would require German leadership in a multinational military union for "protection from Russia".[416] In January of 1916, Naumann concluded that Poles faced a simple choice between Russian domination or the protection of membership in a German-led Central European confederation".[417] Given Congress Poland's decades of suffering under Russian sovereignty, Naumann felt confident that Poles would "choose" autonomy under German leadership, rather than the "coercion" of Russian rule.[418]

German multinationalists indeed expressed confidence that Poles would accept either German suzerainty or membership in a German-led military confederation, as a strategic necessity to defend their autonomy.[419] Emil Daniels argued that Poles apparently desired "secession from the Tsarist Empire at any cost, except for a 'fifth partition of Poland'".[420] Georg

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[406] Rüdiger, "Polen ohne Staat," *Die Hilfe* 1915 (February 11, 1915): 87.
[407] Hans Delbrück, "Die Ursachen des Krieges. Die Chancen. Das Ziel," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 23, 1914, 40.
[408] Wilhelm von Massow, "Die Polen und der Weltkrieg," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (November 6, 1915): 1490; Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," 2157; Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 17; Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 6; Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," 188.
[409] F. Lampe, "Kriegbetroffene Lande," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (January 21, 1916): 173.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Hans F. Helmolt, "Die Gefahr der Doktrin," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (April 1, 1916): 445.
[412] Paul Rohrbach, *Der Deutsche Gedanke in Der Welt.* (Düsseldorf,: K.R. Langewiesche, 1912), 52.
[413] Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," 464.
[414] Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," 481; Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," 895.
[415] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 100.
[416] Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," 464–67.
[417] Naumann, "Wir und die Polen," 891.
[418] Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," 895; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 19, 167.
[419] Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 25.
[420] Daniels, "Die Polen," 176. Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster likewise believed that Congress Poles would accept German leadership as an improvement over Russian rule: Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 165–69.

Gothein insisted that, given Polish memories of Russia's "repression of their national aspirations", and their "suffering" under the "brutality" of Russian rule, even a large Polish-Lithuanian-Couronian state would hewn loyally to military union with the German Empire to preserve its autonomy.[421] Given their vulnerable strategic position, and their hatred of Russia, Delbrück argued that the Poles were not the "natural enemies, but rather, despite all disputes, the natural allies of Germandom".[422] Berlin could be assured that a "truly autonomous Poland can only exist in attachment to the Central Powers".[423]

Multinationalists believed that Berlin could successfully recruit Polish collaboration, if Germany fulfilled two essential prerequisites. First, most realized that in order to instrumentalize Polish nationalism and bend it to German strategic interests, the German Empire needed to present itself as a plausible defender of Polish nationhood. This entailed dismantling the discriminatory legal and social structures of Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik*. The end of Prussian polish policy was to be the first step in reconciliation with Polish nationalism, a dramatic action that would prove Berlin's intentions and give credibility to collaborative multinationalism. Sympathetic Polish authors warned that Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik* reinforced Polish fears of a Germanic *Drang nach Osten*, and pushed some Russian Poles to seek Petrograd's protection.[424] To convince his German audience, Feldman cited contemporary debates in the Russian Duma, wherein Polish representatives still called Germany the "most terrible enemy of Poland", primarily because of Prussia's expropriation law.[425] At the very least, Prussia's exceptional legislation muddied the waters, equating Russian and Prussian nationalization efforts and undercut the credibility of Germany as a defender and ally of the Polish nation.

German multinationalists therefore called for the immediate dismantling of Prussia's anti-Polish legislation.[426] The loyalism demonstrated by Polish Prussians in reporting for conscription catalyzed this process, contributing to the perception that exceptional legislation no longer served any rational purpose. Multinationalists noted that the loyal service of Polish soldiers had demonstrated that the much touted "polish danger" used to justify Germanization had always been a "piece of fantasy", or a "baseless fear", and that Poles had never actually sought to "alter the basis of the Prussian Monarchy", much less "secede from the state".[427] In the autumn of 1914, Justus Hashagen already considered Prussia's Germanization policies patently obsolete.[428] Now that the war had fully discredited the notion of Poles' "treacherous inclinations", Hashagen expected that Conservatives and National Liberals would soon rescind their support for Germanization, and join the Zentrum, Progressives, and Polish Party in opposing it.[429] Because Poles had "performed their duties like everybody else," Max Weber insisted that Berlin reach an "honorable understanding" with the long suffering minority.[430]

Multinationalists further insisted that dismantling Germanization policies in Prussia was essential for winning the trust and collaboration of Polish Russians. Proponents of multinational rule recognized that Prussian Hakatism equipped Russia with excellent material for propaganda, "unnaturally" dragooning "highly-cultivated Poles" into the arms of Petrograd.[431] Grabowsky described Prussia's Germanization policies as the "sins of our past", which now "avenged" themselves of Berlin, as Russia used them to mobilize their Polish minority.[432] Axel Schmidt

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[421] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 85–86.
[422] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 133; Hans Delbrück, "Lord Grey. – der „unabhängige Ausschuß". – nötige Neuorientierung. – England oder Rußland," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, October 28, 1916, 60.
[423] Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga," 83.
[424] Paul Dombek, "Letter, 14 October 1914," October 14, 1914, 3–6, R21574, PA AA; Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," 1071.
[425] Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen," 1072.
[426] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 7.
[427] Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 13; von Guttry, *Die Polen und der Weltkrieg*, 201.
[428] Justus Hashagen, "Polenfrage und äußere Politik," *Die Hilfe*, April 29, 1915, 266.
[429] Ibid., 266–68.
[430] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 740.
[431] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 167; Daniels, "Die Polen," 159.
[432] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 8, 26, 60.

argued that Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik* reinforced the final bastion of Russophilism in Congress Poland. Polish Large landowners, he lamented, still leaned towards Petrograd out of fear that German-rule might introduce Prussian-style expropriation laws, and parcel their estates.[433] Prussian Polish policy, Schmidt argued, didn't simply signal Berlin's lack of respect for Polish speakers, it offered the only precedent by which observers in Congress Poland could assess their own prospects under German imperial influence. It wasn't a good one.

In order to convince prospective collaborators that Germany would respect the autonomy and national culture of a future Polish state, writers like Meinecke, Jastrow, Foerster, Grabowsky, Cleinow, and Gothein all called for the Prussian bureaucracy to thoroughly purge itself of the "Hakatist spirit" and to "renounce national homogenization" as a domestic policy goal.[434] Polish Prussians were henceforth to be treated with "respect, with trust, and with liberality".[435] From the opening salvos of the conflict, multinationalists like Friedrich Naumann considered the end of *Ostmarkenpolitik* indispensible to making German leadership more attractive than Russian rule.[436] On 5 August 1915, as German troops occupied Warsaw, Naumann published an article arguing that unequivocal demonstration of respect for a national culture was the essential prerequisite for recruiting other nations into multinational collaboration.[437] "The Germans," he wrote, "must ford the Vistula with such an ethos".[438] Concretely, Naumann demanded the repeal of Prussia's misguided and failed *Ostmarkenpolitik*.[439] Hans Delbrück agreed, arguing that the German Empire must renounce its failed Germanization policies and refashion itself as a "defender of all smaller nationalities" in Europe.[440]

Multinational imperialists understood and accepted that ending Prussia's Germanization policies implied accepting permanent ethnic heterogeneity within the German Empire.[441] Naumann considered the creation of homogenous national states to be an interesting theoretical exercise, but an implausible goal in reality. Looking to Poland alone, Naumann argued that the complete restoration of the 18th century Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth would itself gather innumerable Germans, Lithuanians, and White Ruthenians into the borders of a "foreign Polish state".[442] Along Germany's Eastern frontier, German and Polish communities had settled in overlapping patterns. Any attempt to "retroactively" reshuffle this ethnic mixture into "perfect squares" with definitive national borders, Naumann argued, was not only doomed to failure, but also risked stoking inter-ethnic violence.[443] Naumann contended that the future peace of *Mitteleuropa* both relied on, and would foster, a "tolerant" national politics. Permanently allied national components would not fear the irredentist claims of their neighbors, and mutual tolerance of minorities would render their presence inert.[444]

Indeed, most multinationalists envisioned the de facto acceptance of national pluralism in the future German Empire. Hans Delbrück directly addressed the fears of nationalists, downplaying the risk of Polish irredentism in a future German multinational order. Poles had proven themselves to be loyal Prussians, without surrendering their Polish identity.[445] Moreover, he insisted that Germanization measures had historically only disenchanted these otherwise loyal subjects, feeding the narrative that Germany was the enemy of Polish culture, and driving Poles

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[433] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1723.
[434] Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 683; Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 118–22; Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 166–67; Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 86; Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 36, 102; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 58; Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 142.
[435] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 166–67.
[436] Friedrich Naumann, "Die Zwischenvölker," *Die Hilfe*, October 22, 1914, 697.
[437] Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," 483–84.
[438] Ibid., 484.
[439] Ibid., 483.
[440] Hans Delbrück, *Krieg und Politik*, vol. 1 (Berlin: G. Stilke, 1918), 4.
[441] Helmolt, "Die Gefahr der Doktrin," 444–45.
[442] Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," 466.
[443] Ibid., 467.
[444] Ibid.; Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," 566.
[445] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 133.

into the arms of nationalists.[446] In short, Hans Delbrück insisted that there was no need, no hope, and no gains to be had in attempting to Germanize Poles. In the future, Delbrück assumed that Prussia would persist as a multinational state, with residents who were simultaneously Polish nationals and German citizens.[447] Both Rohrbach and Meinecke similarly insisted that Polish national identity and loyal citizenship in the German Empire were perfectly compatible, and would continue to be so in the future.[448] "The German nation-state," wrote Meinecke in 1914, "would not become weaker, but stronger, if it could bury the hatchet in the *Ostmark* and if the 'Prussian citizen of Polish nationality' became a full and lasting reality".[449] The conservative Adolf Grabowsky likewise assumed that Poles would remain in Germany as equally-entitled and loyal citizens of the Empire.[450] By 1916 even Max Sering argued that the German Empire must abandon the notion of ethnic homogeneity, and by extension Prussia's Germanization efforts.[451]

Whether optimistic, like Naumann, about the future of German-Polish ethnic relations, or worried, like nationalists, about the potential for instability in the *Ostmark*, Germans believed that domestic reform and imperial expansion were inextricably linked. Multinationalists argued there could be no Polish collaboration if Prussia continued in its efforts to neutralize its own Polish minority. Endorsing Prussian reform entailed conceding that the German Empire was a multiethnic state and should remain so in the future. They did not conceive of the creation of an autonomous satellite Kingdom of Poland as a project of ethnic disentanglement.[452] Germans interested in creating a Polish state certainly expected that some especially committed Polish nationalists might voluntarily migrate from Prussia to a new Polish state. However, they understood that this migration could not be programmatic. Demands for reform represented a real commitment to norms of multinational imperial loyalty, wherein civic identity was privileged over ethnic identity. In essence, they proposed the transformation of Germany into a multinational empire. Whether the grandiose visions of a *Mitteleuropa*, or the more restricted proposals of a satellite Kingdom of Poland, multinationalist plans assumed that Poles would continue to live as citizens of the German Empire, which would itself append explicitly non-German dependencies to the imperial structure.

In order to inspire lasting Polish loyalty to a German-Polish union, multinationalists argued that Berlin also needed to establish robust guarantees that Poland would be empowered to manage its own domestic politics and cultural affairs. Multinationalists believed that the restoration of statehood had preoccupied Polish national politics since the 18th century partitions. They therefore concluded that establishing a state under Polish control would earn the enduring loyalty of Poles to Berlin.[453] Adolf Grabowsky described the "restoration" of a Polish state as the *sine qua non* of the Polish national agenda.[454] Accordingly argued that Berlin could only ensure lasting peace and stability in Congress Poland by allowing Russian Poles to control their own cultural institutions and by steadily turning over legislative, administrative, and executive authority to native Poles.[455] Most German multinationalists agreed that the Polish elite simply wouldn't accept anything less that cultural and political autonomy.[456] Control over Congress Poland, Paul Rohrbach warned, would only increase German security if it satisfied and quieted Polish nationalists. Seizing Poland "through force of arms" and bringing it into a "coercive union" [*Zwangsgemeinschaft*] with Germany would only make Poles the "natural confederates

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[446] Ibid.
[447] Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga," 84–89.
[448] Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 10; Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 683.
[449] Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 683.
[450] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 63, 101–2.
[451] Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," 191.
[452] Eric Weitz has suggested that German plans to reorganize Eastern Europe were structured by the desire to cleanly disentangle and segregate national communities: see Eric Weitz, "From Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008).
[453] Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1721.
[454] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 45.
[455] Ibid., 36–37.
[456] Obermans S.J., "Die Erfüllung der polnischen Sehnsucht," 382.

of Russian revanche".[457]

Multinationalists believed that national autonomy, though imperfect, would satisfy Polish aspirations for self-governance. Handing over control of cultural institutions and domestic administration would guarantee Polish nationhood from the threat of Germanization or Russification, and thereby fulfill the most urgent priorities of political independence.[458] Granting autonomy would indeed encourage Poles to collaborate with Berlin to secure their own statehood from Russia. Adolf Grabowsky stated this principle axiomatically: "The more we leave this land its own particular character, the more certainly we can count on its contentment".[459] Naumann argued that rigorous protections for national autonomy were indispensible for the legitimacy of *Mitteleuropa*. To function, the central apparatus of *Mitteleuropa* must renounce claims to influence any matters which, "have their sacred right within the regional and provincial particularity".[460] Issues of "confession and nationality", including education and language policy, and the regulation of religious institutions, would under no circumstances fall to the authority of "central administration".[461] In order to avoid "unprecedented and unacceptable objections" to the union, Naumann further insisted that member states maintain control over administrative, police, and judicial matters.[462] If the "small nations" of Central Europe considered *Mitteleuropa* a potential vehicle for cultural homogenization, Naumann warned, they would never freely join participate.[463] Conversely, autonomy would positively encourage collaboration. "Our small neighboring nations," he wrote, "must find their national freedom of maneuver in the confederacy of *Mitteleuropa*, so that they may bear and defend the union with us".[464]

Multinationalists hoped that Poles would deem autonomy a sufficient realization of their political aspirations, and would accept German Suzerainty if it was forthcoming.[465] Max Seber, who desired a larger Central European confederation, insisted that smaller states like Poland would gladly accept German leadership because it would amount to a "purely defensive federation", in which they would retain control over national governance.[466] Similarly, those who favored a more narrow German-Polish union, like Emil Daniels, claimed that both Poles would be satisfied with a "Congress Poland as something of an imperial fief, … a dependency of the German Empire".[467] German multinationalists thought Polish signals encouraging in this regard. Multinationalists pointed to editorials published in papers like the *Münchener-Augsburger Abendzeitung*, in which Polish politicians expressed their desire for a Polish state, while simultaneously recognizing that Poland would be practically compelled to attach itself to at least one of the Central Powers".[468] In a memorandum to the Foreign Office, Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster similarly reported encouraging conversations he had with Polish national leaders. They had indicated, he claimed, that while Poles would not accept anything short of political autonomy, they would accept the "restoration of a Kingdom of Poland with a Prussian Prince", or under a "German Catholic" dynasty.[469]

In summary, while multinationalists believed that Polish nationhood needed to be accepted as an inevitable reality, they insisted that Polish nationalists could be recruited as reliable collaborators in a German imperial structure if Berlin created structures to guarantee Polish cultural and political autonomy. Multinationalists demanded not only that the German Empire tolerate Polish national culture in Prussia and Congress Poland, but also that Berlin encourage and channel Polish nationalism into Pro-German directions. Julius Bachem was only

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[457] Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 8.
[458] Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," 626; Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," 191.
[459] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 75.
[460] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 234.
[461] Ibid., 69, 234.
[462] Ibid., 234–35.
[463] Ibid., 236.
[464] Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," 468.
[465] Rohrbach, "Der Kern der polnischen Frage," 9.
[466] Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," 2157–59.
[467] Daniels, "Die Polen," 176.
[468] Wilhelm von Massow, "Das Königreich Polen und Wir," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (August 14, 1915): 1083.
[469] Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," 168.

one of many authors to praise the Government General of Warsaw in the autumn of 1915, when it reopened Warsaw's University and Polytechnic, with Polish as the language of instruction.[470] By granting control of the university to the Faculty and the academic senate of the university, Bachem believed that the Government General was proving its intention to rollback Russia's exclusion of Poles from political life and cultural resources, and earning the trust of Warsaw elites.[471] He urged the government general onwards.

Conclusion

From the summer of 1914 through the autumn of 1916, German left liberals, Catholics, and Conservatives mounted a public campaign supporting the multinational incorporation of Congress Poland into a German imperial structure. German multinationalists believed that German control of Poland's military forces and foreign policy was essential for imperial security. However, they also believed that only German leadership could provide Poland with both peace and the opportunity to freely develop their own culture. Consequently, they believed that Poles would accept German leadership.

Multinationalists should not be mistaken for altruists or humanitarians. Multinationalism was always understood as a means of stabilizing German imperial expansion. Multinationalists freely admitted that securing the German Empire was the *sine qua non* for any efforts to reshape Congress Poland. In their discussions of Poland's future, therefore, the degree of Warsaw's autonomy was often explicitly subordinated to Germany's strategic needs.[472] Even Naumann admitted that this was his central assumption.[473] Indeed, multinationalists did not all expect a future of cheerful inter-ethnic harmony. Many only reluctantly supported national toleration as a practical necessity. There was a spectrum among multinationalist expectations, ranging from Roman Catholicism's religious universalism, through Naumann's faith that cohabitation would breed solidarity, and ending in Sering's grudging support for both Germanization in Prussia and an expansive Polish client state.

Proponents of nationalizing imperialism viciously critiqued multinationalist proposals as naïve and reckless.[474] Domestically, nationalists worried that dismantling of Germanization policies in the Prussian East would enable Polish nationalists to aggressively recruit new followers and subvert German rule in the region.[475] More importantly, nationalist observers worried that a Polish state, now formally organized and equipped with its own army, would invariably betray the German Empire in pursuit of its own interests.[476] The Polish nation, Hoetzsch warned, was in no way friendly to the German Empire, and a Polish state could not be trusted to defend Germany's eastern flank.[477] Warsaw, he argued, would inevitably betray Berlin and attempt to conquer Posen, West Prussia, and Silesia, and until it did, the Polish state would inspire and support Polish nationalist insurgents in these regions.[478] Nationalist observers particularly worried that the creation of a Polish army would merely equip and train a traditionally hostile nation to more effectively fight against the German Empire.[479] Otto Hoetzsch and the *Ostmarkenverein* thus rejected the creation of an "autonomous Kingdom of Poland"

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[470] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 15; Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," 1725; Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 64.
[471] Bachem, "Der Krieg und die Polen," 15.
[472] Fester, "Reale Garantien," 1455.
[473] Friedrich Naumann, "Zwischen national und international," *Die Hilfe* 21, no. 19 (1915): 474.
[474] Reichskanzlei, "Protocol of Conference Btween the Imperial Chancellor and OHL, Kreuznach," August 9, 1917, 23, R43/2477, BArch.
[475] Conze, "Nationalstaat oder Mitteleuropa," 211.
[476] Faust, "Die polnische Gefahr.," 173–74.
[477] Hoetzsch, "Gedanken über die politischen Ziele des Krieges," 231; Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 27.
[478] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 32.
[479] Löwenfeld, "Die Abrechnung mit Russland," 264.

under the Suzerainty of the German Empire.[480] In October 1915, one nationalist thinker warned that a proud and politically conscious nation like Poland would never passively accept vassal status.[481] Such a state would quickly enter into "hate-filled opposition" to their German "suzerain" and seek Russian support in reclaiming the formerly Polish territories of Prussia.[482]

In the first two years of WWI, German intellectuals, academics, politicians, and publicists therefore fiercely debated the proper strategy for securing Germany's imperial ambitions in Congress Poland. To the extent that historians have seriously considered or even acknowledged multinational imperialism, they have often discounted it as a "negligible quantity".[483] This is unwarranted. Multinational imperialism was influential in German public debates over the future of Poland. In the very least it offered stiff competition for nationalist paradigms. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that from 1914 to 1916 multinational strategies of imperial rule in Poland were considered more influential than nationalist visions of a Germanized east.

Periodicals sympathetic to multinationalism enjoyed wide readership and broad influence. *Zeitschrift für Politik*, *Die Hilfe*, *Das Größere Deutschland / Deutsche Politik*, and *Preußische Jahrbücher* all displayed pronounced or overt multinationalist sympathies in this period. *Die Hilfe* enjoyed a particularly large readership by German standards. Between 30,000 and 40,000 individuals subscribed to the magazine during WWI, supplemented by a further 60,000 in newsstand sales.[484] Much of *Die Hilfe*'s readership was well-educated, but it also circulated in the working class and peasantry.[485] In WWI it was one of the most frequently quoted and excerpted magazines in German circulation.[486] *Preußische Jahrbücher* was similarly regarded as the "most important historic-political monthly publication in Germany".[487] As a regular contributor, the vocal multinationalist Paul Rohrbach had long molded discussion of colonial themes and foreign policy in *Preußische Jahrbücher*.[488] Rohrbach had also founded *Das Größere Deutschland* with Ernst Jäckh in April 1914 as an independent weekly for questions of imperialism.[489] Rohrbach's thick ties with government circles in Berlin gave him almost unparalleled access to information on foreign governments, the military situation, and attitudes in the foreign office.[490] In part because of this privileged access, *Das Größere Deutschland* achieved an estimated circulation of 11,000, despite its nascence.[491] Multinationalist periodicals enjoyed circulation at least comparable to that of nationalist rivals. *Die Ostmark*, for instance, could move approximately 50,000 copies in 1914.[492] Interest in war aims gave a bump to the readership of the Pan-German *Alldeutsche Blätter*, but it remained a small publication.[493]

Individual multinationalist intellectuals also wielded outsized influence on German public opinion. Numerous contemporaries, both in Germany and abroad, agreed that Paul Rohrbach had established himself as the "most widely read commentator on foreign- and colonial-policy" in Germany before the war.[494] His work reverberated widely in the German educated middle-class and contemporaries agreed that his ideas influenced considerably more

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[480] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 23–27; Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," 240; Member of the Prussian House of Lords, "Polen, das Glacis im Osten, Militärgrenze," September 2, 1916, 101, R1501/119795, BArch; Schäfer, "Deutschland und der Osten," 4.
[481] "Deutschlands Ostgrenze jetzt und in Zukunft," 298.
[482] Ibid., 296.
[483] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 70.
[484] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 148.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 164.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid., 172. By 1915, it had begun to fall under the financial influence of Pan-Germans, and Rohrbach and Jäckh quickly severed ties with *Das Größere Deutschland*, and re-founded the journal as *Deutsche Politik* in 1916
[490] Ibid., 173.
[491] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 149.
[492] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 221.
[493] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 132.
[494] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 5. The preface to the English translation of *Das Größere Deutschland* described its author as one of the most influential publicists in Germany, whose national ideas resonated with large segments of the German population.

readers than Pan-German propaganda.[495] In 1915, one catholic publicist described Rohrbach as the "famous politician", whose popular writings had converted broad segments of the German population to his views on foreign policy.[496] Surviving sales figures for Rohrbach's publications are incomplete, but overall suggest his wide influence. In 1912, Rohrbach's *Deutsche Gedanke in der Welt* quickly became the "undisputed political best seller" in the German book market, only to be displaced in 1915 by Friedrich Naumann's magnum opus, *Mitteleuropa*.[497] Rohrbach's public success did not ebb in wartime. His 1916 *Weltpolitischen Wanderbuch* sold a brisk 95,000 copies.[498] Rohrbach regularly spoke on well-attended lecture tours before and during the war.[499] His authority on colonial and international affairs was widely respected. Meinecke cited Rohrbach in his own academic work, and praised him as an astute observer of international relations.[500] Naumann had long relied on Rohrbach's expertise in international affairs, and identified *Deutschland unter den Weltvölkern* as necessary reading for anybody hoping to understand German politics during the war.[501]

Friedrich Naumann, already an influential shaper of public opinion before the war, became one of the central voices in the war aims debate from 1914-1916. His book *Mitteleuropa* practically defined public discussion of war aims after its publication in October 1915.[502] Periodicals of every political orientation reviewed, discussed, and debated the book. The first edition of 5,000 copies sold out in two weeks. Within six months it had sold 100,000 copies. Further re-printings and condensed popular editions sold tens of thousands of additional copies by October 1917.[503] Aside from these two giants, the multinationalist camp included a host of influential political commentators and academics. The historians Friedrich Meinecke and Theodor Schiemann, and the sociologist Max Weber all leant their considerable prestige to support multinational imperialism in Poland.[504] Schiemann was himself considered one of the most widely read commentators on foreign policy in Berlin.[505]

Multinational imperialism enjoyed an advantageous political position. Because it avoided the bombastic chauvinism of its nationalist competitors, multinationalism was more politically flexible. Multinational imperialism could draw support from across the political spectrum, including moderate conservatives, left liberals, and the Catholic Center Party. In 1914 the Center Party represented the second largest faction in the wartime Reichstag, and its support was almost indispensible for any legislative agenda. Moreover, of the two competing paradigms of ethnic management, only multinational imperialism could realistically hope to enlist the support of Germany's numerous social democrats. Nationalizing models of expansion did enjoy fervent support, but in a narrower political spectrum, confined mainly to National Liberals, Conservatives, and the German far right.

The logic of multinational imperialism in Poland also managed to win converts from otherwise unsympathetic observers. So long as Germans didn't believe that national identity and politically loyalty were strictly equivalent, multinational ethnic management appeared to offer excellent strategic prospects while avoiding repression and violence. Even Germans who nurtured deep suspicions about Polish reliability were occasionally seduced. Wilhelm von Massow had written with concern about the growing influence of Polish nationals in the Prussian

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[495] Ibid., 158, 175.
[496] Hans Rost, "Literatur zur Frage des Imperialismus und der Selbtsernährung in Deutschland," *Historisch-Politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 156 (1915): 343–45.
[497] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 170.
[498] Ibid.
[499] Ibid., 171.
[500] Friedrich Meinecke, "Nationalismus und nationale Idee (1914)," in *Politische Schriften und Reden*, vol. II, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Darmstadt: Siegfried Toeche-Mittler Verlag, 1958), 86; Delbrück, "Die Ursachen des Krieges.," 44.
[501] Friedrich Naumann, *Neudeutsche Wirtschaftspolitik* (Berlin-Schöneberg: Hilfe Verlag, 1917), 6; Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 167.
[502] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action: 1815-1945*, 151.
[503] Ibid., 206.
[504] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 183.
[505] Ibid., 288.

East since 1895. In 1903 he had published *The Polish Emergency in the German East* [*Polen-Not im Deutschen Osten*]. In the summer 1915, von Massow remained suspicious of Polish motives and stressed the continued need for German oversight to ensure that Poles didn't do anything rash after the war.[506] However, at this point he remained open to Polish statehood and admitted that German and Polish interests could be mutually advanced through a strong collaborative relationship.[507] In 1916 he concluded that Berlin should build a Polish state under German suzerainty, but only after he had systematically rejected every other option as comparatively worse for German security.[508] He simultaneously clarified that German security required robust structures of German control over the territory, and insisted on the continued Germanization of the Prussian East.[509] One Berlin attorney likewise submitted a memorandum to the Imperial Office of the Interior, in which he argued that Germany could only maintain stable control over congress Poland in the short term by building an autonomous Polish state, replete with its own government and army, under the "sovereignty and protection of the German Empire".[510] However, the author hoped to use this new Kingdom of Poland to press linguistic Germanization in the more distant future.[511] While the author espoused a nationalist vision of a future German Empire, he recognized that, in the present, multinationalism alone could achieve Berlin's immediate strategic needs.

Max Sering represented the most prominent example of reluctant multinationalism. Historians have blamed Sering's promotion of inner colonization for contributing to the emergence of the radical right's obsession with acquiring *Lebensraum* for the German Volk.[512] During the war he advocated seizing new settlement-territories in Eastern Europe, and he continued to support the Prussia's domestic Germanization efforts. However, Sering refrained from sanctioning ethnic cleansing in annexed Polish territory, and overtly supported for the erection of a multinational German-Polish union.[513] Sering's abrupt turn to multinational imperialism in Poland demonstrates that ethnic cleansing as a strategy of imperial expansion still faced a high bar in Wilhelmine Germany, in part because multinational strategies of imperialism offered a credible alternative.

In the first half of WWI, German multinationalists were confident in the popularity of their ideas. Even before the runaway success of *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann believed that most Germans were well disposed to the creation of a Central European confederacy.[514] By September 1916, one memorandum drafted by an attorney in Berlin noted that, within present German literature on Polish question, the opinion was almost "universal" that Poland would become an autonomous state and that Germans now argued "only about the degree of this autonomy".[515] By contrast, the rhetoric of nationalizing imperialists betrayed a pervasive anxiety about their own marginalization. One should not mistake the cascade of Pan-German and *Ostmarkenverein* literature that appeared during this period for public acceptance. Nationalists freely admitted that their position was embattled, even unpopular.[516] Already in December 1914, Otto Hoetzsch lamented in a memorandum to the foreign office that the idea of a restoring a Polish state as a buffer or satellite had become an "axiom" in the German public.[517] In September 1915, an *Ostmarkenverein* memorandum to the Foreign Office opened by stating the association's concern

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[506] von Massow, "Das Königreich Polen und Wir," 1081.
[507] Ibid.
[508] von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," 1460–70.
[509] Ibid.
[510] Victor Nowak, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage. Entwurf einer Verfassung für Polen," September 15, 1916, 150–51, R1501/119795, BArch.
[511] Ibid., 148.
[512] Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space," 13.
[513] Historians generally neglect to mention this public defection from the *Archive for Inner Colonization*
[514] Naumann, "Mitteleuropäische Zukunftsgedanken," 443.
[515] Nowak, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," 148.
[516] One memorandum submitted to the Prussian House of Lords denounced the supposedly widely-held opinion favoring an "autonomous" Poland: Member of the Prussian House of Lords, "Polen, das Glacis im Osten, Militärgrenze," 101.
[517] Hoetzsch, "Vorläufige Gedanken zur polnischen Frage," 12.

with public discussions about the future of Poland.[518] They considered it their solemn duty to denounce the widely-held suggestion, "that the Poles have the right, based on their cultural and religious community [*with the West*], to be liberated, to receive a quasi-autonomous state, and then to become a sure bulwark against Russian power".[519] Even as they denounced multinational imperialism, their tone throughout the memorandum suggested that the *Ostmarkenverein* believed their position was losing ground in German public debates.

Well-positioned observers in the government agreed that public opinion was shifting in favor of multinational imperialism. In the Summer of 1916 Friedrich Karl Gramsch, the *Regierungspräsident* for the region of Königsberg and the recent president of the Prussian Settlement Commission, penned a letter which reached the Imperial Office of the Interior. After having discussed the issue widely, Gramsch complained that there appeared to be a growing consensus in Germany against annexing Polish territory.[520] With obvious exasperation, he concluded that the German public would tolerate "only the creation of an autonomous Poland, which must be made safe for us".[521] If Germany must create such an autonomous Polish state, Gramsch hoped that Berlin would encourage voluntary emigration by expropriating the Russian crown-lands and state domains in Congress Poland, and selling them to Polish Prussians.[522] Naturally, the former head of the Settlement Commission hoped that Prussia would continue its prewar Germanization policies.[523] He did not consider much more than this plausible.

From 1914 to 1916, the German public remained divided over the future structure and composition of an expanded German imperium. Enthusiasts of a nationalizing or colonial ethnic German Empire faced strong opposition from proponents of a future German-led multinational federation. This debate played out largely over the future of Congress Poland primarily because of its strategic indispensability. Berlin had much to gain by successfully controlling Congress Poland, and much to lose if it failed. By 1916, the sides continued to debate furiously, but multinationalism remained a strong alternative in the German public sphere, perhaps even the one preferred by the majority of German citizens.

Recognizing this vibrant contest between multinational and nationalizing modes of imperialism has significant implications for our understanding of the German-Polish relations before and during WWI. Despite frustrations with Prussia's failed Germanization policies, disciplinary and violent nationalizing strategies for managing Polish space did not enjoy hegemonic, or perhaps even predominant, support within the German public. German political observers largely agreed, by this point, that nations existed, that Polish national identity was immune to Germanization, and that national consciousness significantly impacted political perception. Nationalizing imperialists took this to mean that the German Empire must secure new territories through more aggressive, and even violent protocols of homogenization. Yet their position still faced a high bar to acceptance among the German population so long as multinational imperialism appeared to offer a credible strategy for managing precisely the same conditions. Because multinationalism offered the German Empire tremendous strategic gains with none of the repression demanded by its competitors, even ardent pre-war supporters of German colonization like Max Sering petitioned for a German-Polish union. The question of Polish loyalty was the central issue of this debate. So long as German observers believed that Berlin could recruit the collaboration of Polish nationals in the future, they could accept the continued existence of national diversity as consistent with imperial expansion. From 1914-1916, Polish collaboration still seemed a relatively reasonable expectation in influential sectors of the German public. This central barrier to nationalizing imperialism thus remained high.

Multinationalist publicists also exercised disproportionate influence on government circles in Berlin, both through their connections with imperial officials, and through their own

[518] Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur polnischen Frage," 240.
[519] Ibid., 242.
[520] Friedrich Karl Gramsch, "Letter, Copied to Reichsamt Des Innern, Summer 1916," Summer 1916, 274, R1501/119780, BArch.
[521] Ibid.
[522] Ibid., 275.
[523] Ibid., 276.

positions in the wartime government.[524] Theodor Schiemann had cultivated contacts within the officer corps during his time as a lecturer at the Prussian War Academy, and maintained a close association with Kaiser Wilhelm II.[525] Ignaz Jastrow personally submitted frequent memoranda to General Hans Hartwig von Beseler, the Governor General of Warsaw.[526] In 1915 the conservative Georg Cleinow was appointed Chief of Press Administration for German-occupied Poland, where he oversaw matters of censorship and propaganda, and monitored Polish public opinion.[527] While there, he submitted several memoranda to Beseler. The left liberal circle of politicians, academics, and publicists surrounding Delbrück, Rohrbach, and Naumann maintained especially close ties with the German Government. Friedrich Naumann and Georg Gothein both served as Reichstag deputies. Both Naumann and Ernst Jäckh participated in the Working Committee for Mitteleuropa [*Arbeitsausschuß für Mitteleuropa*], an advisory body of academics, politicians, and businessmen working with the Chancellery to realize a greater Central European Confederation.[528] Through the Working Committee, Jäckh and Naumann had a direct line to the Chancellery, General Hindenburg, and the occupation government in Warsaw to agitate for the inclusion of Poland as part of a German-led Confederation.[529]

Paul Rohrbach likewise occupied an exceptionally influential role in the imperial government. Rohrbach had first developed contacts on Wilhelmstraße in 1903, when Karl Helfferich had recruited him to work for the Colonial Department.[530] Before the war, both State Secretary of the Foreign Office Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter and State Secretary of the Imperial Colonial Office Wilhelm Solf had consulted with Rohrbach on colonial matters.[531] The Foreign Office's financial support for several of his foreign research trips revealed Wilhelmstraße's high regard for Rohrbach's opinions.[532] In wartime, Rohrbach's personal connections helped him to secure positions in the German Empire's intelligence and propaganda apparatus. He initially worked on the staff of the Naval Office's department of foreign intelligence, before being transferred to the Foreign Office's hastily organized Press Department, where he worked on the *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst*.[533] Here he was responsible for organizing weekly reports on political activity and public opinion in hostile and neutral countries.[534] His team in this endeavor included multinationalists like Axel Schmidt, who served as Rohrbach's Russia expert, Theodor Schiemann, and Ernst Jäckh.[535] In the early war he developed a close working relationship with then Under Secretary of State Arthur Zimmerman. When Rohrbach considered leaving the Foreign Office, Zimmerman encouraged him to continue his work in the Press Department.[536] Rohrbach, and Schiemann together became leading proponents of Eastern European war aims within the Foreign Office. Rohrbach was able to personally present his ideas on the future reorganization of Poland and Eastern Europe to the very top military and civilian leadership of the German Empire.[537] *Das Größere Deutschland / Deutsche Politik* benefitted from Rohrbach's extensive access and became a semi-official press organ of the German government. Individual articles from the publication were reprinted and distributed as German propaganda from embassies in neutral countries.[538]

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[524] The influence of multinationalist publicists and academics on von Beseler's own policy-making will be discussed in Chapter 5.
[525] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 287.
[526] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 119; Ignaz Jastrow, "Letter to Governor General von Beseler, 16 December 1916," December 16, 1916, 1–8, N30/35, BArch.
[527] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 58.
[528] Arbeitsausschuß für Mitteleuropa, "Protocol for 2 October 1916," October 2, 1916, 1, N30/30, BArch.
[529] Ibid., 2–4.
[530] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 59.
[531] Ibid., 139.
[532] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 174.
[533] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 193–96.
[534] Ibid., 196.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Ibid., 197.
[537] Ibid., 200.
[538] Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland,"* 173.

The impact of multinationalist agitation on the development of concrete policies in Berlin will be discussed below. As with the German public, opinion on the Polish question within the Reichstag, the main offices of the Imperial Government, and the Prussian bureaucracy was split during the first two years of the war. Division mirrored the public debate, with officials backing nationalizing or multinational imperial projects in Poland largely according to their faith in the reliability of future Polish collaboration. In the Spring and Summer of 1916, the leadership of the German Empire opted to build a Polish state under German Suzerainty. On 5 November 1916, the Kaisers of Germany and Austria-Hungary issued a joint proclamation declaring the restoration of Polish statehood. Chapter six will examine why Berlin opted for multinational imperialism in Poland, and explore the breadth of this project's support in the German and Prussian governments.

The following four chapters, however, will closely examine the assumptions of German multinational imperialism. In addition to their belief that Poles would accept German Suzerainty as a necessary safeguard against Russian expansionism, three overarching assumptions convinced many Germans to support multinationalist imperialism within Polish space. First, multinationalists understood Poland as a civilized and occidental nation, both capable of sustaining organized political movements, and worthy of preserving. Secondly, they interpreted WWI as a conflict in which Germany was tasked with defending multinational pluralism from the threat of homogenization under the Russian Empire. Finally, multinationalists drew from a vibrant tradition of German federalist nationalism. They understood Germany's own national history as demonstrating that institutionalized cultural pluralism was not only compatible with imperial security, it positively fortified and enriched the German Empire. These assumptions will each be examined in the subsequent sections.

* 2 *

Renouncing Colonialism for the Civilized East

Recent historiography has suggested that the governing strategies of European colonialism, as well as the ideologies used to justify them, fundamentally shaped how German intellectuals thought about continental expansion in WWI, particularly in Eastern Europe. A growing number of historians have argued that a complex of derogatory stereotypes and assumptions about Slavic and Baltic populations, formed a hegemonic "mindscape of the east" which strongly influenced German imperial projects during WWI. As noted above, nationalist associations like the Pan-German League and the *Ostmarkenverein* indeed led a vocal faction in appropriating colonial tropes to justify German rule in Poland.[1] German nationalists imagined Poland as a *Res nullius*, a practically empty or uncivilized frontier, neglected by feckless indigenes, and awaiting the arrival of intrepid German pioneers to bring it under proper cultivation.[2] Much as colonialists had described Africans as essentially foreign and primitive, nationalizing imperialists described Poles as Asiatic barbarians, and indeed doubted the capacity of Poles to advance their own culture without German tutelage.[3] Nationalist commentators frequently appealed to a narrative of German-Polish relations, which interpreted medieval German settlers and merchants in Poland as *Kulturträger*, responsible for bringing civilization to otherwise hapless slavs.[4] The caricature of the irredeemably primitive Pole led many nationalists to fear that Germans adjacent to Poles might "go native", i.e. that contact with Polish barbarism might subvert German civilization through cultural corruption or racial decay.[5] Heightened by westward migratory flows in the late 19th century, many German observers had come to fear that a "Slavic flood" would polonize Eastern German, that migrant farm labor constituted the vanguard of a Polish counter-colonization.[6] Most importantly, these depictions of Poles mirrored colonialist descriptions of Africans in claiming that Poles were essentially incapable of governing their own economic or political affairs.[7]

Certainly such colonial rhetoric, and precedents established by three decades of German colonialism in Africa, fueled and even inspired the agendas of nationalizing imperialists. However, colonial frameworks did not, as some have implied, monopolize or even dominate German perceptions of Polish nationhood or discussions of how to sustainably manage Polish space. There was no single hegemonic "mindscape of the east". The colonialist model represented only one of at least two basic approaches to interpreting Polish nationhood circulating in Wilhelmine Germany before and during WWI.

Multinationalists explicitly, vocally, and frequently challenged each of the above-mentioned colonial postulates. Multinationalists understood Polish nationhood as a robust and sophisticated European cultural tradition with a proven history of self-governance. Despite being subjected to decades of foreign rule and nationalization policies, they noted that Polish culture continued to attract the loyalties of a large and politically sophisticated vernacular elite. Multinationalists' recognition of Poland as a civilized and politically sophisticated nation ultimately determined what objectives and systems of ethnic management they considered appropriate and plausible for organizing Poland as imperial space. Convinced that Polish nationalism could mobilize sustained and complex political action, German multinationalists argued that Poles would effectively resist any attempt at linguistic or territorial Germanization.

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[1] Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 6, 19.
[2] Robert L Nelson, "Colonialism in Europe? The Case Against Salt Water," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.
[3] Ibid., 5.
[4] Sönke Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik: Das Beispiel der 'Preußischen Jahrbücher' (1886-1914)," in *Cultural Landscapes: Transatlantische Perspektiven auf Wirkungen und Auswirkungen deutscher Kultur und Geschichte im östlichen Europa*, ed. Andrew Demshuk and Tobias Weger (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015), 75–76.
[5] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 8, 96.
[6] Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 87.
[7] Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 6, 19; Linck, "Die polnische Landschaft als Objekt deutscher Kolonialrhetorik," 89.

But multinationalists also insisted that precisely this advanced degree of political competence meant that Poland could significantly contribute to German security in Eastern Europe as a partner with the German Empire. Furthermore, their belief in the cultural productivity of Polish nationhood encouraged multinationalists to incorporate Poland into an ideal vision of Europe, which considered national diversity valuable and worthy of preservation. Multinationalists' belief that Poland was civilized, occidental, and endangered, reinforced their support for the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty, an agenda which many of them were not willing to pursue for other, supposedly less advanced, ethnic groups.

Mittelafrika and Mitteleuropa: Multinationalist Views of Overseas Colonialism

Multinationalists did not oppose colonial practice on principle. Many of the foremost multinational thinkers ardently supported German colonialism where they deemed this to be an appropriate method of ethnic management. Paul Rohrbach's career offers an illustrative case for untangling the relationship between German colonialism and multinational practice. Indeed, Historians who argue that colonialism decisively influenced German imperial ambitions in Eastern Europe have routinely cited Paul Rohrbach's career and colonial writings to demonstrate what they consider to be a growing ideological consensus in pre-war Germany in support of aggressive expansionism.[8] Some have pointed to Rohrbach's endorsement of violent struggle to secure land for German settlement as a clear precursor to Nazism's obsession with *Lebensraum*.[9]

Rohrbach began his career in German foreign policy as a staunch supporter of German colonialism in Africa. His prewar writings promoted colonial expansion as a necessary means of asserting German influence on the global stage and securing access to strategic resources. To Rohrbach colonies represented breadbaskets for the metropole, destinations for emigration, necessary markets for German exports, and reserves of raw materials.[10] Throughout his career, Rohrbach supported an exploitative model of colonial rule, advocated the constant assertion of white supremacy in African colonies through the frequent application of violence, and justified his vision for German rule with unrepentant racism. He considered violent ethnic cleansing a permissible, if regrettably wasteful, instrument for asserting German rule in Africa.

In June 1903, Karl Helfferich recruited Paul Rohrbach, then an aspiring geographer, to serve as the settlement-commissioner for German Southwest Africa, where he would serve until 1906.[11] He reported directly to the Colonial Department in Berlin and Governor Leutwein in Windhuk. He received a budget of 300,000 marks to resolve Germany's central difficulty in Southwest Africa: actually enticing German migrants to settle there.[12] Berlin had aimed to transform Southwest Africa into a white settler colony, and had been encouraging migration since their takeover in 1890. But by 1903, only 4,674 white Germans had settled in Southwest Africa.[13] Prospective German farmers found conditions in Southwest Africa unattractive. Dry steppe and desert covered most of the territory, and irregular rainfall made only 30% of this region marginally arable.[14] The Herero, highly successful native pastoralists, owned the vast

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[8] Geoff Eley, "Empire by Land or Sea?: Germany's Imperial Imaginary, 1840-1945," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 33–36.

[9] Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005): 434–36; Eley, "Empire by Land or Sea?," 33–37; David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 111–13, 237; Jürgen Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination," *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (2005): 212.

[10] Paul Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft: Kulturpolitische Grundsätze für die Rassen- und Missionsfragen* (Berlin-Schöneberg: Buchverlag der "Hilfe", G.m.b.H., 1909), 27.

[11] Paul Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift: Zwei Menschenalter erlebter Weltgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hans Dulk, 1953), 59.

[12] Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 112.

[13] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 430.

[14] L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1977), 17.

majority of this land, and few desired to sell their assets to German farmers.[15] Instead the Herero practice of leasing land to colonists represented an embarrassing inversion of colonial relations, as Germans found themselves beholden to native landlords. German settlers increasingly resented Governor Leutwein, whose gradualist policies were perceived as benefitting natives at the expense of settlers.[16] Rohrbach's mission in 1903 was to explore options for making Southwest Africa more attractive for German settlement, mainly by expediting the acquisition of Herero land.[17] Specifically, Rohrbach would evaluate methods of forced land expropriation recently employed in neighboring British colonies and survey parcels of land for potential German settlements.[18]

Rohrbach arrived in Southwest Africa in August 1903, just as German-Herero relations were collapsing. Windhuk alienated the Herero with a mixture of land-avarice, neglect, brutality, and a judiciary that consistently prioritized the claims and interests of settlers over those of the Herero.[19] The Paramount Chief Samuel Maherero complained that the Germans daily "shoot someone dead for no reason at all".[20] On 12 January 1904, after a local incident of German brutality, Maherero declared his intention to fight the German colonial state and halt the dispossession of Herero land and their political repression.[21] The Herero launched a series of raids on 267 German farmsteads in the vicinity of Windhuk, killing 123 European settlers.[22]

The German response to the Herero revolt quickly spiraled into a campaign of systematic extermination. The Herero rebellion taxed the resources of Southwest Africa's *Schutztruppe,* which faced a mobile enemy in a vast territory with little manpower. Governor Leutwein responded with a policy of exemplary punishment to deter further Herero resistance. He instituted courts martial and recommended executions for those found guilty of robbery, murder, or leadership in the rebellion.[23] In order to supplement their ranks, the *Schutztruppe* organized "punitive expeditions" composed of deputized German civilians. These paramilitary excursions amounted to more or less arbitrary murder sprees of local black Africans. Rohrbach, caught in Grootfontein during the rebellion, enlisted and served as a *Schutztruppe* auxiliary for three months, during which he participated in several patrols and punitive expeditions.[24] For decades he wrote proudly of his participation in this bush patrols.[25] By his own admission, his patrols shot at Africans regardless of their participation in the rebellion. Rohrbach estimated that by March 1904, his patrols had killed 20 men, most of them Bergdemaras and Bushmen, not Herero.[26]

After amassing a substantial white military force in Southwest Africa, the *Schutztruppe* drove the revolting Herero to the north of the colony and cornered them on the elevated Waterberg Plateau, the last major source of water before the arid steppe gave way to the vast Omaheke desert. On 11 August 1904, the German commander Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha launched a botched attack on the Plateau, during which the majority of the Herero warriors and their families fled into the adjacent dessert. Unable to pursue, and fearful that negotiation with the Herero might undermine Germany's reputation, von Trotha had sealed the Herero in the Omaheke dessert denied refugees access to water. On 2 October, von Trotha issued his infamous *Vernichtungsbefehl*, which declared all Herero's outlaws, and ordered German soldiers to shoot any on sight.[27] This systematic program of annihilation would result in the

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[15] Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 115.
[16] Ibid., 117.
[17] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 59.
[18] Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 111; Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 62.
[19] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8.
[20] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 437.
[21] Ibid., 430.
[22] Ibid., 440; Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 8.
[23] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 18.
[24] Ibid., 19; Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 63.
[25] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 63.
[26] Paul Rohrbach, *Aus Südwest-Afrikas schweren Tagen.* (Berlin: Weicher, 1909), 79, 113, 127, 132.
[27] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 442.

deaths of between 40,000 and 70,000 Herero.[28] The Nama, in part alarmed by the colonial state's ruthless treatment of the Herero, themselves revolted against German rule in October, beginning a conflict that would last four years and cost between 12,000 and 15,000 Nama lives.[29]

Even after the withdrawal of the *Vernichtungsbefehl*, German troops interred thousands of capatured Herero and Nama in hastily erected concentration camps.[30] The German camp system subjected prisoners to hard labor, which, combined with severe malnutrition, produced a 45% mortality rate.[31] Death in the camps proved so common that authorities overseeing the Swakopmund work camp kept blank death certificates on hand with the cause of death already filled-in: "death by exhaustion followed by privation".[32] Shark Island, actually a peninsula in the bay of Lüderitz, became the most notorious of these camps. Known colloquially to Germans as "Death Island", it seems to have been operated to deliberately kill its prisoners.[33] Prisoners were subjected to rape and beatings, and suffered from typhus outbreaks and exposure to the cold winds of the South Atlantic with negligible shelter. The German authorities responsible for the operation of the camp actively refused to transfer prisoners to camps with better conditions.[34]

The orgy of violence in German Southwest Africa horrified many metropolitan observers and inspired a backlash in the Reichstag against what was perceived as colonial mismanagement.[35] Yet this violence did not temper Rohrbach's enthusiasm for colonialism. Rohrbach continued to vocally oppose reform efforts offered by the later *Reichskolonialamt* to ease economic burdens and slow German settlement in Africa.[36] After returning to Germany, Rohrbach took a position as a lecturer for in colonial economics at the Berlin school of commerce.[37] In 1909 he purchased a 10,000 Hektar Farm in the Southwest Africa on the Ugab River, after which he proudly described himself as an "African great estate owner".[38] In 1907 he wrote *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, based partially on his experiences in Southwest Africa, to serve as a settlement handbook for Germany's colonies.[39] In 1912, Rohrbach further articulated his agenda for German colonial expansion as a means for Germany to compete with other global powers.[40] Together, these two works offer a clear picture of Rohrbach's colonial priorities, and the brutal methods of government that he endorsed to achieve them.

Rohrbach bluntly held that German imperial policy should aim solely for the economic exploitation of colonies. Colonial administration, therefore, should focus on creating efficient systems of "exploitation of the soil" and "exploitation of the native".[41] Native Africans, in his thinking, were a potentially valuable reserve of physical labor, but had little intrinsic value beyond this. Rohrbach argued that Berlin must tailor its native policy to the cultural and political aptitude of Africans, which he considered a "lower race", characterized by "arrogance" and "lack of foresight".[42] Rohrbach considered this primitivity immutable.[43] He insisted that any attempts to civilize or integrate colonized peoples would be futile, and potentially counterproductive, as it might falsely encourage Africans to resist.[44] German management of native Africans, Rohrbach proposed, should therefore provide them with a modicum of material elevation, and otherwise focus on efficiently exploiting their labor for their own ends.

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[28] Ibid., 431.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 446.
[31] Ibid., 449.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 446–47.
[34] Ibid., 447–48.
[35] Ibid., 432.
[36] Bradley Naranch, "'Colonized Body,' 'Oriental Machine': Debating Race, Railroads, and the Politics of Reconstruction in Germany and East Africa, 1906-1910," *Central European History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 327.
[37] Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 239.
[38] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 117.
[39] Ibid., 91.
[40] Paul Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.* (Düsseldorf,: K.R. Langewiesche, 1912), 133.
[41] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 12.
[42] Ibid., 1–5.
[43] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 135.
[44] Ibid.

Indeed, he supported an uncompromising and brutal regime of white settlement and economic extraction in the colonies.[45] Rohrbach actually argued that Berlin should accelerate German settlement in mercantile colonies like Cameroon and East Africa.[46] He recommended restricting African farming in East Africa to regions unsuitable for European settlement.[47] Though Rohrbach regarded the recent genocide in Southwest Africa as an unfortunate waste of human resources, he believed it had incidental benefits.[48] To create a settlement colony, Rohrbach wrote from Berlin in 1907, it would have eventually been necessary to seize Hereroland and redistribute the valuable land to German settlers.[49] The violent suppression of the Herero and Nama revolts had, in Rohrbach's mind, achieved necessary objectives: disarmament of the Herero and Nama, opening of their tribal lands for white settlement, and the dissolution of tribal political organization.[50] In short, it had transformed the natives from "subjects of once divided nations and tribes into a single, mostly homogenous, serving class".[51]

Rohrbach envisioned structuring Germany's colonies as strict racial hierarchies, where black Africans counted only as economic resources for white settlers. In 1907, Rohrbach posited that African societies had utterly failed to contribute to the cultural or technological progress of humanity, and therefore had no right to independent existence as such, and no claim against the seizure of their land by more productive whites.[52] He therefore sanctioned the expropriation of African land for the use of German settlers.[53] Rohrbach argued that Africans remaining in the colonies must be governed by the "principle of subordination", wherein the German nation claimed the right to use the "work-power of our black African subjects" for its own ends.[54] Accordingly, black laborers would work under the supervision of a permanent white ruling caste [*Oberschicht*], freeing Germans to concentrate on the business of management and rule.[55] In 1912 he indulged in his racial fantasy.

> The future farmer and estate owner near the Kilimandsharo [Kilimanjaro], on the shores of Lake Njassa or on the highlands of Angola, will of course, take some part in the management of his property, but the real laborers and domestic servants and the inferior assistants in the workshop will all be drawn from the colored races because they are numerous, physically strong and capable, and because their pay and keep are much cheaper than those of white laborers.[56]

To achieve this, Rohrbach endorsed programs of "compulsory labor" like those already in use in some regions of East Africa, wherein black subjects would provide provide 30 days of paid labor on white settlements every four months,.[57]

To defend this structure of economic extraction, Rohrbach endorsed the assertion of unquestionable military rule over African subjects, even through extreme violence.[58] Outnumbered, white Germans would govern via constant assertions of raw power, an "overwhelming force of arms" that would habituate blacks to subserviance through "relentlessly stringent punishment".[59] To avoid any potential resistance, Rohrbach argued that Germans should

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[45] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 52.
[46] Ibid., 27.
[47] Juhani Koponen, *Development for Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania 1884-1914*, Finish Historical Society Studia Historica (Helsinki: Distributor, Tiedekirja, 1994), 248.
[48] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 64.
[49] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 17–19, 282.
[50] Ibid., 20.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 20–21.
[53] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 141.
[54] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 52.
[55] Ibid., 53.
[56] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 136.
[57] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 45–46.
[58] Ibid., 52.
[59] Ibid., 96.

avoid any attempts to "civilize" native Africans. He wrote warily of Christian missions, not just because he considered civilization impossible, but because he feared that Protestantism's emphasis on liberation might give black subjects the wrong idea.[60] Although he felt that the "extermination of Africans" to be logistically impossible, he was comfortable with the idea of localized eradication.[61] "In order to secure the peaceful white settlement against the bad, culturally inept and predatory native tribe," he wrote, "it is possible that actual eradication may become necessary under certain conditions".[62]

Paul Rohrbach, endorsed the most brutal and violent forms of racial rule in German colonialism. He prioritized the acquisition of African colonies for economic exploitation as an urgent necessity for Germany. He even took up arms to achieve this end. Rohrbach considered black Africans a race fit only to be dominated, useful only for its physical labor. This became a central theme of his publication career after his return from Southwest Africa. In the very first issue of his *Das Größere Deutschland*, Rohrbach penned an op-ed attacking colonial reforms allowing Cameroonians to petition the Reichstag.[63]

Rohrbach was a particularly unapologetic supporter of German rule in Africa, yet his approval of colonialism was more exemplary than atypical for multinationalist thinkers. Naumann had not only supported Rohrbach's colonial writings before WWI, he had also defended the career of Carl Peters, the reprehensible colonial adventurer largely responsible for Germany's acquisition of East Africa.[64] Meinecke had similarly supported the enlargement of the German colonial empire before the outbreak of WWI.[65] Given their prewar support for colonialism, many, if not most, multinationalists also looked favorably on the idea of expanding Germany's empire in Africa as an explicit war goal. Prominent multinationalists were enthusiastic proponents of building a *Mittelafrika* to parallel Germany's control of *Mitteleuropa*.[66] Paul Rohrbach, Ernst Jäckh, and Friedrich Meinecke all recommended that Germany demand Belgian territory in the Congo-Basin during future peace negotiations.[67] Naumann, imagined that the African continent would serve as a vast reserve of raw materials and potential economic development for the future *Mitteleuropa*.[68] In the future, Delbrück dreamed that cargo-submarines would ship vital freight from *Mittelafrika* to German ports, preventing a reprise of Britain's current blockade.[69] Multinationalists always held expansion in Africa as a secondary, or even tertiary wargoal, and they invested far less time developing their vision for German rule. In broad strokes, however, multinationalists supported either a continuation of the colonial status quo or the consolidation and expansion of German rule over central Africa.

Abandoning Colonial Models: The Contrasting Aims and Methods of German Colonialism and Multinational Imperialism

Yet multinationalists drew sharp distinctions between German projects in Central Africa and Central Europe. Multinationalists understood German expansion in Africa as an explicitly racial project of European superiority. They did not see the war in Europe as a *colonial* war, in which a German *Herrenvolk* struggled to master hapless slavs, and they were not interested in importing "colonial" methods and justifications of rule into Europe. Multinationalists explicitly

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[60] Ibid., 91–94.
[61] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*.
[62] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*. quoted in Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 113.
[63] Paul Rohrbach, "Der Duala Konflikt," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 1 (April 5, 1914): 26.
[64] Walter Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das "Größere Deutschland": Ethischer Imperialismus im wilhelmischen Zeitalter, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kulturprotestantismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1972), 167.
[65] Friedrich Meinecke, "Präliminarien der Kriegsziele," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 31 (July 31, 1915): 1001.
[66] Franz Kolbe, "Nach diesem Kriege muß Deutschland ein großes Kolonialreich besitzen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (December 15, 1916): 2228.
[67] Ernst Jäckh, "Grundlagen deutscher Weltpolitik," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 3 (April 19, 1914): 65; Paul Rohrbach, "Weltvolk – Seevolk," *Deutsche Politik* 1, no. 8 (February 18, 1916): 337; Friedrich Meinecke, "Letter to Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz, 30 August 1914," in *Neue Briefe Und Dokumente*, ed. Gisela Bock and Gerhard Ritter, vol. X, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 197.
[68] "Notizen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (June 23, 1916): 1142.
[69] Hans Delbrück, "Versöhnungs-Friede. Macht-Friede. Deutscher Friede," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, June 2, 1917, 226.

distinguished between African colonies and occupied territories in Europe, arguing that they required entirely different parameters of rule and governance.[70] Despite their comfort with colonialism in Africa, multinationalists opposed pursuing similar goals in occupied Poland through colonial strategies of rule. Multinationalist proposals for union with Poland diverged from colonial precedents in both their aims and methods of rule. Their proposed economic objectives, political and cultural policies, and military aims differed categorically from those of contemporary German colonies.

Germany had acquired its colonies in Africa largely by improvisation between 1883 and 1884.[71] Chartered companies under German protection, like the *Deutsch Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft* [DOAG] had initially established and administered German claims in territories like East Africa or Southwest Africa, but by the early 1890s, their rife corruption and administrative incompetence had sparked local revolts and mutinies. To avoid the embarrassing collapse of German colonial rule, Berlin had taken over the direct administration of Togo, Cameroon, East Africa, and Southwest Africa.[72] However, the Foreign Office still exercised little direct control over local policy, which remained largely in the hands of local governors.[73]

The economic relationship between Germany and Poland imagined by multinationalists differed starkly from Germany's brutal exploitation of Africa. German planners distinguished between "trade colonies" and "settler colonies". "Trade colonies", like Togo, Cameroon, and East Africa, were developed to exploit valuable tropical commodities like coffee, tobacco, cotton, and oil-seeds. "Settler colonies", namely Germany's subtropical holdings in Southwest Africa were considered more climatically appropriate for actual colonization. Neither economic regime was kind to resident African subjects. In Southwest Africa, German colonial planners had always harbored ambitions for the almost wholesale redistribution of African land to incoming German settlers. Early administrators had attempted to seize African lands outright, but their limited military resources had forced them to restrain their appetites. Before the revolt, Windhuk's relatively permissive economic policy had allowed Herero pastoralists to partake in the lucrative regional cattle trade. The violent suppression of the Herero and Nama inaugurated a concerted effort to convert Africans into a "landless proletariat" available for German purposes.[74] Those Herero who escaped von Trotha's genocidal campaign, and survived the subsequent concentration camps, returned to the colonial fold completely dispossessed of land and livestock.[75] In his reflections on his time in Southwest Africa, Leutwein wrote approvingly that the "whole future of the colony lies in the gradual transfer of the land from the hands of the work-shy natives into white hands".[76]

Economic exploitation in the trade colonies entailed similarly frightening consequences for native Africans. While white settlement was a lower priority, blacks still enjoyed almost no effective protection from Germans attempting to seize their land.[77] On several occasions, German East Africa expropriated large parcels of land and transplanted their native populations to reservations.[78] Trade colony policy consistently aimed to extract ever larger quantities of black labor, while also privileging the economic interests of white settlers and firms.[79] Cameroonians under the governorship of Jesco von Puttkamer (1895-1907) were thus dragooned to work for white-owned plantations, where they received little pay, endured terrible working conditions, and suffered high rates of mortality.[80] German East Africa experimented with a variety of policies to extract native labor. Initially, district officials simply compelled Africans to labor on public

[70] Kolbe, "Nach diesem Kriege muß Deutschland ein großes Kolonialreich besitzen," 2232.
[71] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, ix.
[72] Ibid., 18–19.
[73] Ibid., 50.
[74] Ibid., 75.
[75] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 446.
[76] Quoted in Ibid., 434.
[77] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 147.
[78] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 253.
[79] Ibid., 322–23.
[80] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 167–68.

works projects or work in the fields.[81] Settlers and plantation owners freely rounded-up African laborers for their own purposes, either by taking local chiefs hostage or simply forcing groups of workers to toil at gunpoint.[82] Use of outright compulsory labor receded over time, but German East Africa continued to employ corvee labor without food or remuneration for railway and road construction.[83] In the 1890s, East Africa began to supplant compulsory labor with the introduction of a universal hut tax, whose collection was specifically designed to force Africans to enter the wage-labor market.[84] The consequences for delinquency were severe. Between 1899 and 1900, German East Africa conscripted 7,000 tax defaulters into forced labor assignments. Other tax defaulters were whipped, or saw their huts burnt, their cattle confiscated, or their wives taken hostage.[85] Even when work was freely contracted, state officials and private employers were legally empowered to corporally punish black laborers at their own discretion. The Kiboko, a hippopotamus-hide whip, was the preferred instrument of punishment. In East Africa, documented floggings rose from 3500 in 1901/1902 to 6300 in 1905/1906, figures which likely represented a small proportion of the actual instances.[86]

The Maji-Maji rebellion, which flared in July of 1905 and smoldered until 1908, signaled the depth of East African natives' hatred for the colonial economy and resulted in hundreds of thousands of African deaths.[87] The 1904 Herero revolt in Southwest Africa and the Maji-Maji revolt shocked the German public, and triggered a crisis of confidence in German colonial rule.[88] In an attempt to restore faith in the endeavor, Berlin transferred responsibility for colonial administration from the Foreign Office to a new independent Imperial Colonial Office [*Reichskolonialamt*], now headed by the reformer Bernhard Dernburg. On paper Dernburg promised to relieve Africans and encourage native labor through development and market forces, rather than compulsion.[89] Dernburg therefore committed to slowing politically destabilizing white settlement in trade colonies like East Africa, and recommended a more laissez-faire attitude towards native labor.[90]

In reality, Dernburg's touted reforms did little to protect African laborers. His agenda faced vehement opposition from within the Colonial Office, and Dernburg ultimately resigned in 1910.[91] Even at the apogee of reform efforts, the position of black subjects remained marginal and dangerous. In East Africa, many district officials quietly ignored reforms and continued to privilege colonists' interests.[92] District officials circumvented Dar es Salaam's disapproval of compulsory labor, by introducing labor cards, which required Africans to fulfill wage labor for European employers for 30 days out of every four months.[93] The spread of this practice to other districts indicates at least the tacit consent of Dar es Salaam. Governor Rechenberg, Dernburg's man in German East Africa, attempted to mitigate land alienation, and introduced new regulations to prevent massive relocations of Africans.[94] However, Europeans continued to chase Africans off of lands newly leased or purchased from Rechenberg's administration.[95]

Multinationalist notions of a German-Polish economic relationship bore little resemblance to this exploitative colonial precedent. German multinationalists almost unanimously recommended the integration of a new Polish state into a common tariff union with

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[81] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 339.
[82] Ibid., 341.
[83] Ibid., 344–45.
[84] Ibid., 216.
[85] Ibid., 218–19.
[86] Ibid., 360.
[87] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 121; Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 229–39, 597.
[88] Naranch, "'Colonized Body,' 'Oriental Machine,'" 299.
[89] Ibid., 302.
[90] Ibid., 320.
[91] Ibid., 311, 326.
[92] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 285.
[93] Ibid., 400–401.
[94] Ibid., 290–91.
[95] Ibid., 291.

Germany. Many simply assumed that Berlin would set the level of common tariffs, though some contended that Poland should be involved in the decision-making process.[96] This proposed economic union involved neither peacetime conscription of labor, nor unilateral exploitation. Multinationalists expressly denied the accusation that "Germany wants to make a sort of colony out of Poland as a substitute for the lost African territories", or that it Poland would become a dumping ground for cheap German exports.[97] Multinationalists like Naumann recognized that Congress Poland was already relatively industrialized. Economically well developed and home to large industrial hubs like Łódz and Warsaw, they believed Poland lacked the "characteristics" of a colonial economy, like a "surplus of raw materials and masterless land".[98] Poland's incorporation into *Mitteleuropa* would certainly benefit the German Empire economically, but Poland was, in Naumann's words, "by its nature industrial" not colonial.[99] Poles would be responsible for leading the reconstruction and development of their own economy after the war, a task that Naumann believed they would meet capably.[100] Indeed, Naumann insisted that Germany's strategic interest lay in the "political-economic" recovery and success of the Polish state.[101] The conservative Adolf Grabowsky similarly argued that it would be lunacy to deindustrialize Poland, and that bolstering Polish heavy industry would more effectively fortify the imperial frontier.[102] Grabowsky turned colonial norms on their head when he suggested that Germany would need to become a new market for *Polish* industrial exports.[103] Even Max Sering believed that the German Empire needed to build a "strong Poland" by expanding, not impoverishing the Polish economy. He suggested that a temporary postwar tariff might be necessary to protect Polish industry from German competition.[104]

Multinationalist notions of the political and cultural relationship between Germany and Poland likewise broke completely with colonial models. Lacking the financial resources to erect a comprehensive administration, German colonialists had practically tolerated some local self-governance and relied on the collaboration of existing political elites. Germany's holdings in Africa stretched over 900,000 square miles of undeveloped territory, more than four times the size of the German Empire in Europe.[105] To administer such vast territories directly required financial resources that Berlin was simply unwilling to commit. German East Africa in 1913 still budgeted for only *70* European bureaucrats of all ranks.[106] Initially DOAG had governed by coopting the existing power structures of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, and through brutal campaigns of pacification in the interior.[107] After Berli`n assumed responsibility for the colony in 1891, Dar es Salaam sought to stabilize local conditions and avoid costly military expenditures by negotiating with local elites.[108] Gradually, German East Africa projected its administrative authority inland by constructing *Bomas* throughout the country, fortified military stations situated in easily defensible areas.[109] Bomas, however, were small, poorly financed, and thinly spread, usually manned by less than 7 German officers and NCO's.[110] Dar-es-Salaam therefore delegated significant administrative responsibilities to *Akidas*, Swahili auxiliaries trained as tax

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[96] See, for example, Matthias Erzberger, "Memorandum on War Aims, 5 September 1914," September 5, 1914, 31, R43/2476, BArch.
[97] Friedrich Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1917), 18–25; Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 81.
[98] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 22.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 25.
[101] Ibid., 3.
[102] Adolf Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1916), 79.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Max Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 1916, 26, N30/35, BArch.
[105] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, IX.
[106] Ibid., 83.
[107] Ibid., 13, 59; Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 131.
[108] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 665.
[109] Ibid., 114.
[110] Ibid., 138.

collectors, minor judges, and police, or to *Jumbas*, coopted native headmen.[111] Even then, effective German control remained limited to coastal areas and the immediate vicinity of Bomas.[112] Lacking administrative and military resources, the East African government made the pragmatic choice not to molest large inland polities, like those in Burundi and Rwanda.[113]

German Southwest Africa was envisioned from the start as a settlement colony, and Windhuk had therefore attempted to consolidate direct and autocratic control over the Nama and Herero quite early.[114] But even Windhuk opted to leave the Ovambo people in the distant and geographically isolated northern reaches of the colony to their own devices. Too far to threaten the settlement project and too expensive to be bothered with, Windhuk demanded only that they sign treaties recognizing German supremacy.[115]

But none of these policies pursued a positive goal. African self-rule, where it existed, was a function of improvisation or pragmatism. German colonial governments had never seriously attempted to fortify the authority of native potentates. Moreover, German colonial policy consistently aimed to either coopt or erode the independence and influence of native authorities, and replace it with more direct German control. After 1891, the German East African government had relied on native *Akidas* and *Jumbas*, though their responsibilities and authority always remained tightly circumscribed by district officials.[116] Dar es Salaam progressively concentrated power in German district officials and accordingly stripped *Jumbas* of their powers and responsibilities whenever possible.[117] After 1898 the German administration began to extend bureaucratic control over nominally autonomous *Jumbas*, furnishing them with *Akidas* to advise and oversee the increasingly invasive collection of taxes.[118] Rechenberg later began to replace semi-autonomous *Jumbas* with German trained *Akidas* altogether.[119] In Southwest Africa, efforts to consolidate German power were yet more overt and violent. When available resources proved insufficient to dominate the natives, Governor Leutwein had adopted a divide and rule strategy in 1893, asserting German influence by balancing the Herero and Nama against one another.[120] But by 1904, voices within the colonial administration pushed Windhuk to corrode and break tribal autonomy in the colony and clear the way for more aggressive German settlement.[121] Colonial governance therefore trended towards the consolidation of German power, not the institutionalization of native governance. By 1914, the German colonial system had largely abandoned the idea of indirect rule.

Efforts to dissolve black political organization did not entail a positive goal of eventual assimilation into German society. Supporters of German colonialism never assumed that Africans would be "civilized" or "turned into black Europeans".[122] Instead, colonial legislation functioned to legally inscribe and fortify European supremacy. German East Africa did train *Akidas* in schools in Tanga, Bangamoyo, and Dar es Salaam.[123] However, these schools never trained native Africans for positions of responsibility in the colonial administration[124] Both state and missionary schools in East Africa, wary of equipping natives with too much knowledge, deliberately kept the highest tiers of education remedial.[125] State schools initially offered at most a four year course to produce literate clerks for employment as *Akidas*, but not educated elites who

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[111] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 74.
[112] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 141.
[113] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 74.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 119.
[117] Ibid., 117–18, 285.
[118] Ibid., 122.
[119] Ibid., 282.
[120] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 20.
[121] Ibid., 75.
[122] Ibid., 41.
[123] Ibid., 78.
[124] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 507.
[125] Ibid., 526.

might undermine the colonial order or seek equality with white colonists.[126] Colonial policy aimed to reinforce the boundary between black and white subjects, and prevent black Africans from obtaining the same legal status as white colonialists. German Southwest Africa thus introduced anti-miscegenation laws in 1905 in an effort to preclude the birth of any mixed-race subjects who might undermine this racial boundary. In 1906, German East Africa followed suit, to be mimicked on the other side of the globe by German Samoa in 1912. In 1909, German Southwest Africa reinforced this prohibition by making interracial marriage punishable with loss of suffrage for the German party.[127] German colonial policy therefore isolated black Africans as a subordinate racial caste, working to gradually erode any remaining political autonomy, and deliberately closing off any avenues for equality through national integration.

Multinationalists, on the other hand, insisted on Polish political autonomy and the fortification of Polish national culture. Proposals for a Kingdom of Poland, implied staffing every level of the Polish bureaucracy with trained and educated Poles, and establishing an independent monarchy. Robust native self-governance, so central to multinationalist plans for Poland, had never been pursued or even seriously considered as an ideal political architecture for Germany's African colonies. Multinationalist visions for Poland also articulated a cultural policy wholly inconsistent with colonial precedent. In Poland, multinationalists supported Polish management of the education system, and the opening of institutions of higher education to support Polish self-governance. They aimed for the institutionalization and invigoration of Polish culture.

Multinationalist proposals for union with Poland broke most clearly with colonial precedent in military policy. Germany's colonial infantry, the *Schutztruppe*, and its use of native auxillary infantry, *Askaris*, differed in almost every conceivable way from the proposed Polish army. Germany had designed the *Schutztruppe* as a small gendarmerie to assert and maintain Berlin's authority in Togo, Cameroon, East-Africa, and South-West Africa. It was not organized to or equipped to defend German territory in pitched battles against other regular armies.[128] It remained remarkably small. In 1904, the entire German East African colony had less than 2,400 troops at its disposal, most of them native *Askaris*.[129] In 1910, only 10 light *Schutztruppe* companies policed the vast and mountainous jungles of Cameroon.[130]

The organization and composition of the *Schutztruppe* reflected its primary function as an internal security force and instrument of German command in the colonies. The *Schutztruppe* mirrored the foundational racial hierarchy of German colonialism. It remained a white-led force designed to assert white authority through violence. From the beginning, native *Askaris* filled out the rank and file of *Schutztruppe* units, but Germany carefully maintained white authority by ensuring that only Germans held officer rank.[131] Even then, administrators constantly worried about the reliability of black African troops and their willingness to police colonial subjects. Above all German officials wanted to avoid accidentally furnishing colonized populations with a proficient military force.[132] The colonial army therefore recruited *Askaris* either as military slaves or as a mercenary force. Germans avoided deploying *Askaris* in their home regions, lest communal loyalties compete with German authority. To ensure German command of the force, administrators recruited many *Askaris* from African territories beyond the borders of their own colonies. The Cameroon administration formed its first *Schutztruppe* units by purchasing slaves from Dahomey, switching to paid enlistment only in 1893.[133] Thereafter Cameroon recruited at least half of their *Askaris* from non-German West Africa. Similarly, most soldiers of the East African *Schutztruppe* were recruited from Sudan, usually drawn from unemployed former

[126] Ibid., 519.
[127] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 438–39.
[128] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 116–17.
[129] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 134.
[130] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 116–17.
[131] Ibid., 65–66.
[132] Ibid., 116.
[133] Ibid.

soldiers of the Egyptian army.[134] Dar-es-Salaam complemented these cadres with Manyema recruits from the Congo, feared by East African locals as purported "man-eaters".[135] Only later, and with some reluctance, did East Africa begin to recruit native subjects into their regiments.

As a failsafe against an *Askari*-led revolt, colonial authorities trained black African soldiers only as light infantry and equipped them only with obsolete small arms.[136] Whereas white soldiers in the *Schutztruppe* were outfitted with a full complement of modern rifles, carbines, machine guns and light mountain-artillery, *Askaris* were given only antiquated weapons like the mark 71/84, a military surplus rifle which still employed black-powder charges and lead bullets.[137] Antiquated weaponry reflected both Berlin's objectives for the *Askaris*, and their lack of faith in black African loyalty. In German Southwest Africa, the composition and equipment of the *Schutztruppe* reflected the region's unique status as a planned settler colony. Not trusting *Askaris* to defend German farms, Windhuk organized a heavily armed and predominantly white colonial force.[138] In peacetime, German administrators had a robust force of nine companies and three light batteries at their disposal.[139] The comparative weakness of *Askaris*, manifested a broader policy of absolute ethnic German military supremacy in the colonies. Every colonial government worked to dissolve independent African armies and militias and thoroughly disarm the local population.[140] The initial imposition of German rule always entailed the dissolution of native forces and the broader disarmament of the population.[141] Paul Rohrbach vehemently supported this policy in his 1907 reflection on German colonial policy. "The existence of politically organized indigenous tribes with considerable communal holdings in land and cattle," he wrote, "presents a grave political danger for the colonizers under any circumstance".[142] Better to disarm and dissolve African political organizations from the start.

Multinationalist proposals for the creation of a Polish army differed in means and objectives from German colonialism. German multinationalists did not aim to extend German rule through the systematic disarmament of Poles, but to arm, equip, train, and organize a Polish army as a means of consolidating German security. Unlike the *Askaris,* multinationalists proposed that levies would be drawn locally, and led by Polish officers, answering to the King of Poland. Under Polish command, this army was imagined as safeguarding Polish autonomy, not enforcing Berlin's whim on a colonized population. The creation of a loyal and useful Polish army constituted a central objective of German multinationalism. Multinationalists envisioned the Polish army, as an autonomous, well-equipped, and well-trained military force that would be capable of trading body-blows with the regular armies of continental-Europe. The Polish army would be the first line of defense against potential Russian invasions. In Africa, German rule relied on native military weakness. In Poland, German multinational imperialism prioritized Polish military strength.

Indeed, multinationalists wrote quite explicitly about their opposition to using colonial methods of rule in Poland. On the continent, Meinecke insisted that Germany would need to "strictly" avoid the "brutal violence of rule" which it had practiced in Africa.[143] Many supported expansion in Africa precisely because they believed that neither union with Poland nor a larger Central European confederation could fulfill the same objectives as colonial empire. Germany would still require African territory for the exploitation of labor and raw materials, and as space for German colonization. Thus when Friedrich Naumann spoke at a conference of the *Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* in Berlin in 1916, he criticized those of his countrymen who had begun to misuse the term *Mitteleuropa*, specifically by suggesting that *Mitteleuropa* would be an ersatz-

[134] Ibid., 116–17.
[135] Ibid., 118.
[136] Ibid., 119.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 122.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 120.
[141] Ibid., 26–27.
[142] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 19.
[143] Meinecke, "Letter to Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz, 30 August 1914," 198.

colony.[144] *Mitteleuropa* and overseas colonization, he emphasized, were distinct, but interrelated, projects, and Germany should continue to pursue colonies in Africa to secure its access to raw materials.[145] Paul Rohrbach similarly wrote that leadership over a multinational union in Central Europe constituted the necessary foundation for German world power, but not its apotheosis. Germany would continue to require colonial territories to supply the economic resources and opportunities that Central European hegemony could not, and Germany therefore needed to expand its African holdings.[146] Africa, Rohrbach wrote, would be Germany's "actual field of… colonial- and overseas policy".[147] Multinationalists insisted that Germans must continue to be a "Kolonialvolk".[148] Just not in Europe.

Naumann insisted that Germany's medieval role as "colonizers" of Eastern Europe was long past. As a "young" nation, Naumann wrote, Germans had indeed pushed the "borders of their nation far to the East and had made vast lands German through missionary work and lordly repression [*Herrendruck*]… Earlier they had transformed a collection of Slavs and other foreigners into Germans".[149] Yet, Germany could no longer realistically think of conquests on the model of Charlegmagne or the Teutonic order. Germany, he contended, lacked the requisite moral "coarseness", and groups like the Pan-German League needed to recognize that their "fantasy" of annexations would require acts of violence incompatible with German standards.[150]

Paul Rohrbach similarly differentiated Polish territory and colonial space. Before the war, Rohrbach had explicitly dismissed nationalist fantasies of colonizing parts of continental Europe as impossible. In his mind, Germany abutted no empty or 'masterless' territories. "Germany", he wrote, "is enclosed by countries of a developed and old stately culture. It borders no territory of potential colonial expansion. It lies in the middle of the great powers".[151] After August 1914, Rohrbach similarly dismissed any suggestion that the German Empire should demographically manipulate or ethnically cleanse territories in Eastern Europe as "outrageous".[152] Though he had glibly endorsed the most extreme violence against African subjects, Rohrbach explicitly differentiated German empire-building in Europe from colonial rule. Germany's path to world-power status, Rohrbach insisted, would differ from the standard modern European trajectory. States like Great Britain, Russia, and France had founded their empires by taking control of "immense empty spaces" which were "habitable and economically useful for the white race" and had grown by exploiting "valuable subservient foreign races and cultures".[153] Rohrbach recognized that this was not a practical path to German hegemony. He estimated that only 15,000 Germans emigrated from Germany yearly, and this would be insufficient to populate virgin territories.[154] Even if German migrant flows were more robust, there simply were no longer sufficient "empty" or underdeveloped territories remaining in the world to furnish the sort of colonial hegemony that Germany would require. "The empty quarters of this world have been given away, everywhere new and strong peoples develop, on whose enslavement and repression we neither can nor should think".[155] Though he supported the colonization of Africa as a strategy for supplementing German imperial power, he explicitly considered it a project secondary to the assertion of German leadership in Europe.[156]

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[144] "Notizen," 1142.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Paul Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?* (Weimar: Gustave Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1917), 46, 60.
[147] Ibid., 60.
[148] Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 180.
[149] Ibid., 84.
[150] Ibid., 85.
[151] Paul Rohrbach, *Der Krieg und die deutsche Politik* (Dresden: Verlag "Das grössere Deutschland," 1914), 73. This assessment would notably change when war with Russia made the Baltics a potential destination for German settlement. His assessment for Poland, however, would not change.
[152] Paul Rohrbach, "Sorge, Weg und Wille," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 26, 1914): 759.
[153] Paul Rohrbach, "Das Kriegsziel im Schützengraben," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 4, 1916): 243–44.
[154] Ibid., 245–46.
[155] Ibid., 245; Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 34.
[156] Rohrbach, "Das Kriegsziel im Schützengraben," 246.

Kulturfähigkeit and Staatsfähigkeit: Multinationalist Recognition of Polish Civilization and its Influence on Imperial Strategies.

Multinationalists believed that colonial strategies of ethnic management would be wholly inappropriate for achieving German strategic aims in the East because they recognized Poland as a civilized nation. They systematically rejected each of the colonial tropes propagated in nationalist literature. Racial hierarchy, economic exploitation, ethnic cleansing, and rule by military force might serve German objectives in Africa, but multinationalists believed that Poland's status as a civilized nation rendered these methods both morally impermissible, and perhaps more importantly, practically inadvisable.

Multinationalists recognized that Poland was a densely populated and intensively cultivated region, not the *Herrenlos* territory or *res nullius* of colonialist fantasies. Multinationalists did not tire of citing population density figures for Poland. In western Poland, this reached 128 residents per square kilometer, actually much higher than the average population density of the German Empire. Rural areas in Congress Poland were actually experiencing a period of acute overpopulation.[157] Even conservatives like Grabowsky and Cleinow recognized that Congress Poland was simply too thickly settled to make German colonization a realistic prospect.[158] The left liberal Gothein agreed with this assessment, adding that the German nation did not possess the "human material" necessary to settle new regions. Noting that emigration had recently declined, and that the German Empire had become an importer of seasonal agricultural labor, Gothein described eastward colonization as a irrational goal.[159]

Culturally and historically, multinationalists held that Poland belonged inextricably to Europe. In contrasting "occidental" Europe with "oriental" or "Asiatic" Russia, many writers simply assumed that Poland constituted the eastern frontier of the former, not the western border of the latter.[160] Naumann took it as a given that Poland had the same legitimate claims for national preservation and development that Germany enjoyed.[161] When listing western European nations, Axel Schmidt grouped Poland with the likes of Germany, France, Austria, England, and Italy.[162] One author cautioned his readers not to mistakenly conflate "Eastern European Slavs" with Russians. After all, "… their church, their script as well as their social life and art are most strongly influenced or adopted from Italy, Germany, and France".[163] Grabowsky similarly argued that Poland's historic Roman Catholic piety had ensconced it firmly in occidental culture.[164]

Rohrbach insisted that Poland was culturally European. During his wartime travels through Poland Rohrbach reported overnighting with German commanders in Nieborów Palace, the ancestral seat of the Radziwiłł aristocratic line. He effusively complemented Hieronymus Radziwill's impressive library.[165] While doing so, Rohrbach reflected on the nobleman's 18th century globe. "Europa" had been painted on the globe beginning with "E" in Spain, and ending with "A" in Minsk, near the former border between the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia.[166] Rohrbach considered the globe-maker's judgment correct. "Minsk is really a good place", he suggested, "to again paint in the 'A' on the end of 'Europa'".[167] He implied was that this would be the Central Powers' primary task for the future.

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[157] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 45.
[158] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 78; Georg Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," June 14, 1916, 78, N30/35, BArch.
[159] Georg Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1917), 25–26.
[160] Paul Rohrbach, "Polen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 17, 1916): 2014.
[161] Friedrich Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," *Die Hilfe* 21 (April 8, 1915): 466.
[162] Axel Schmidt, "Russen und Deutsche," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 19, 1914): 717. See also Axel Schmidt, "Russland und die Polenfrage," *Die Hilfe*, September 14, 1916, 602.
[163] F. Lampe, "Kriegbetroffene Lande," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (January 21, 1916): 172.
[164] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 12.
[165] Paul Rohrbach, "Polen," *Die Hilfe*, August 26, 1915, 547.DH 1915, 547. Indeed he complemented the Polish aristocrat, noting that most of the volumes had well-worn spines.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

Multinationalists also defended Polish culture's economic competence. Gothein considered it "absolutely inappropriate" to impugn the "economic initiative and organizational talent" of the Polish people, and considered the stereotype of "Polish economy" mistaken.[168] Max Sering bluntly rebuffed colonial depictions of Polish culture. He recognized chronic problems in the economy of Congress Poland, particularly its underdeveloped credit system, lacking educational system, unregulated rivers, and poor transportation infrastructure.[169] Yet Sering blamed Russian administrative neglect, not Polish culture, for these deficiencies.[170] Rohrbach similarly assigned responsibility for Congress Poland's faulty economy to the "neglect" of Russian rule.[171]

Some multinationalist authors even penned lengthier tributes to Polish national culture, highlighting accomplishments in Polish literature and the arts. Rohrbach described Poles as the "most developed" of the West Slavic peoples.[172] One author fondly recalled learning Polish in order to read Mickiewicz, and lauded Poles as "warriors and patriots" with "all of the markings of a cultural nation [*Kulturvolk*]".[173] After traveling through Poland one reporter described the essential equality of Germans and Poles. "All theories of racial divergence and national antagonism [between Germans and Poles] are becoming unstable".[174] Poles, he wrote elsewhere, had a vibrant "interior life, a thirsty and hungry soul".[175] By 1915, describing the Polish nation as a civilized culture had virtually become the institutional position of *Die Hilfe, Das Größere Deutschland,* and *Preußische Jahrbücher*. Even Germans who harbored considerable suspicions about Polish nationalism, such as Wilhelm von Massow, felt that German portrayals of Polish history had undervalued Poland's cultural contributions to the development of Eastern Europe.[176] He admitted that Poles had shown their own "national character", with its own sense of common history, moral characteristics, and literature, all of which had managed to "survive the downfall of the state".[177]

Naumann offered a sophisticated depiction of Polish national culture throughout the war, one that mixed admiration with critique. The upper strata of Polish cultured society, Naumann insisted, actually possessed talents in fantasy, melody, and interior art superior to their average German counterpart.[178] If there was a deficiency in Polish culture, Naumann argued, it derived from precisely this overdeveloped romanticism. "There lives in him [the Pole]," he wrote, "a romantic, Catholic, eastern protest against the rational culture of the sons of Kant".[179] Polish readers, he clarified, could comprehend Schiller with greater clarity than Germans, but had not developed the same technical and organizational aptitudes as Naumann's countrymen. Yet Naumann believed that this technical deficiency derived from Russia's long tenure of autocratic governance, and their systematic exclusion from participation in politics or administration. While willing to criticize Polish culture, Naumann and other multinationalists were adamant that Polish national culture was both vibrant and sophisticated, not primitive. Moreover, they identified any serious deficiencies in Polish political culture as disfigurements caused by the Russian imperial administration, not by racial inferiority.[180]

Because German multinationalists considered Poland to be have a civilized and sophisticated national culture, they did not fear that contact with Polish national culture would

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[168] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 21.
[169] Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 30–31.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Rohrbach, "Polen," August 26, 1915, 546.
[172] Rohrbach, "Polen," November 17, 1916, 2014.
[173] R. Hildebrandt, "Polen und Deutschland," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 3, no. 22 (May 1, 1916): 110.
[174] Gerhard Hildebrand, "Feldbrief aus Polen," *Die Hilfe*, March 18, 1915, 175.
[175] Gerhard Hildebrand, "Feldbrief aus Polen," *Die Hilfe*, March 25, 1915, 190.
[176] Wilhelm von Massow, "Die Polen und der Weltkrieg," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (November 6, 1915): 1486.
[177] Wilhelm von Massow, *Wie steht es mit Polen?*, Der deutsche Krieg (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1915), 5–6.
[178] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 28.
[179] Ibid., 29.
[180] Ibid.

corrode German cultural or racial integrity. That is, they did not fear "reverse diffusionism". Anxieties about the decay of German vitality through intermarriage or cultural exchange with Poles are startlingly absent from their writings. One author blithely dismissed the concern, noting that the culture of eastern Prussia was "strongly" influenced Slavic culture and yet "not degenerate".[181] In the same article, he praised the national diversity of the human race, as each nation contributed to the "wealth" of human progress.[182] Naumann considered the contemporary border between German and Polish national communities politically important, but historically quite arbitrary. Naumann believed that the sharp and permanent distinction between the German and Polish nations had only emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries as mass literacy and modern education had hardened national identity. This event had essentially frozen a previously dynamic process wherein Prussia had gradually Germanized its Polish partition. At this moment, "An originally Slavic territory, that had been since Germanized, asserted itself as German. Another, that was not Germanized, asserted itself as Polish".[183] In essence, Naumann fully acknowledged that the German national community contained many descendants of former slavs, indeed that the "eastern Half" of its population was more or less formed from this mixture.[184] This did not worry him in the slightest. Indeed, his confidence that nationalization had frozen the line between German and Polish national communities in the 19th century meant that Naumann did not fear that a Polish "flood" would polonize German communities.

The conservative Adolf Grabowsky actually approved of the mutual cultural influence exerted by the German and Polish nations upon one another. He noted that Polish culture had been deeply influenced by both French and German sources. He saw pervasive French inspiration in Poland's Rococo statues and the architecture of Łazienki Palace in Warsaw. The German Hanseatic League, he believed, had also imported into Poland a commercial "spirit of determined perseverance" that still existed in the Polish middle classes.[185] Yet Grabowsky understood this as part of a wider cultural interchange between the Polish and German nations. The Polish poet Stanisław Przybyszewski had, after all, deeply influenced the German literary scene in the 1890s.[186] Grabowsky praised his work and admired how the power of his verse had "enflamed" a generation of German minds.[187]

If anybody was likely to harbor anxieties about the diffusion of Polish culture, it was Paul Rohrbach. Rohrbach's views on colonial rule were deeply entangled with notions of Europeans' racial superiority. In 1907, Rohrbach had so worried about the corrosive influences of contact with racially 'inferior' Africans, that he had pressed for strict segregation of black subjects from white colonists, and the comprehensive policing of interracial sexual congress in all of Germany's possessions.[188] However, Rohrbach did not fear similar racial or cultural degeneration from contact with Poles. Already by 1912, Rohrbach wrote critically of historical narratives that had cast German-Polish relations in the role of violent racial struggle. When Rohrbach discussed the expansion of the East Frankish Empire between the 8th and 11th centuries and the *Ostsiedlung*, he did not follow the nationalist template and describe this mostly peaceful colonization as the conquest or elimination of primitive Slavic tribes by culturally or racially superior Germanic settlers.

> It is wrong to assume, as people used to do, that the gradual re-Germanization of the people east of the Elbe and the Saale was due to the extermination of the Slavic tribes, who had settled there. On the contrary, it was the result of a

[181] Freiherr von Mackay, "Polen und Deutschland," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 5, no. 43 (December 1, 1916): 213.
[182] Ibid., 222.
[183] Friedrich Naumann, *Kriegsgedanken zur Welt- und Seelengeschichte* (Vienna: Verlag des Volksbildungshauses Wiener Urania, 1917), 58.
[184] Friedrich Naumann, *Deutschland und Oesterreich* (Berlin: Verlag der "Hilfe," 1900), 22.
[185] Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 12.
[186] Ibid., 11.
[187] Ibid., 11–12.
[188] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 22–24.

> comprehensive blood mixture of the conquered with the conquerors.[189]

Paul Rohrbach lauded this encounter as a period productive cultural exchange.[190] He argued that the admixture of Slavic racial or cultural characteristics had tempered some of Germans' own natural deficiencies. Specifically, Rohrbach believed that this commingling had dulled Germans' infamous propensity for particularism and factionalism and reinforced the population's receptivity to unified government. This integration claimed, had tilled fertile ground for the sprouting of an unusually strong and centralized German monarchy, Prussia.[191] As Prussian military strength had eventually forged the German Empire in 1871, Rohrbach understood this moment as a fateful episode in Germany's development as a continental power.[192] Rohrbach neither seriously feared the threat of Polish cultural diffusion, nor claimed that German cultural progress had been historically achieved through the displacement or elimination of Eastern peoples for German colonization. Rather, he claimed that German progress had been founded on the admixture and melding of German and Slavic peoples.

This was not an idiosyncratic viewpoint. Willy Hellpach mimicked Rohrbach's interpretation of Germans' history in Eastern Europe. Like Rohrbach, Hellpach's evaluation of Slavic character could be easily dismissed for condescension. Hellpach agreed with Rohrbach that the national character of Slavs exhibited a greater comfort with "subservience" to authority. Yet like Rohrbach, he insisted that the confluence of Polish and German national characters had produced the "Prussian" character, ultimately Germany's salvation from political fragmentation.[193] Consequently, Hellpach stressed the need for German receptivity to cultural interaction and mutual learning between Germans and "West-Slavs" (Poles).[194]

Germans found the strongest evidence of Polish cultural sophistication in the resilience of Polish identity following the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish nation's ability to inspire loyalty even without state support demonstrated to multinationalists that Polish culture offered a viable and attractive alternative to German *Kultur*. Naumann praised Poland for having developed a strong sense of national culture despite its political impotence.[195] Moreover, multinationalists believed that Poles could not have survived the pressures of Russification or Germanization had Polish national culture not equipped its members with the capacity to organize their own political parties and institutions. In 1916 Paul Rohrbach wrote of Poles' successful resistance to Prussian Germanization policies.

> It is well known how our Prussian-German cultural policy and how our Polish policy in Posen and Westpreußen worked. We know and sense, that there a middle class, efficient, active, and educated in economic and every other competence, emerged to perform the actual work in efforts of the Prussian Poles to preserve their exterior and interior national rights.[196]

Naumann agreed, noting that Berlin would fail to repress Polish national politics, no matter how many resources they committed to the endeavor.[197] German multinationalists interpreted Polish

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[189] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*., 67.
[190] Modern scholarship has attributed the medieval migration of German eastwards to a series of conquests and peaceful settlements. Relations between German settlers and resident populations varied. Some Slavic rulers invited German settlement as a strategy of economic development. Elsewhere relations were hostile. See Christian Lübke, "Before Colonization: Christendom at the Slav Frontier and Pagan Resistance," in *The Germans and the East*, ed. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 21; Jan M. Piskorski, "Medieval Colonization in East Central Europe," in *The Germans and the East*, ed. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 30.
[191] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*., 68.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Willy Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 8, 1915): 625.
[194] Ibid., 624.
[195] Friedrich Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," *Die Hilfe* 31 (August 5, 1915): 481.
[196] Rohrbach, "Polen," November 17, 1916, 2013.
[197] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 33.

cultural durability in two ways. Positively, the enduring attraction of Polish culture to its adherents testified to its value as a European civilization. Negatively, multinationalists concluded that it made Germanization impractical.

Poles' effective resistance to homogenizing state policies also evinced, for multinationalists, that they were quite capable of "organizing themselves" and managing their own affairs.[198] Multinationalists rejected the notion that Poles needed German oversight to govern themselves, and instead insisted that Poland was a *Staatsnation*, a national community capable of political self-assertion and state organization. Indeed, several writers openly derided stereotype of Polish incapacity. Wilhelm von Massow denounced the circulating "dogma of the permanent incapacity of Poles to form their own state".[199] Rather, he noted, Poles in both the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian partitions had proven the Polish nation's "vitality and developmental capacity".[200]Any economic or cultural backwardness in Congress Poland, he argued, only proved that Russian mismanagement had retarded the progress of an otherwise capable nation.[201] Nations far less rich "in political merit" than the Poles, he argued, had successfully created national-states in the past.[202] Naumann confidently predicted that the Polish nation, which had already proven its ability to organize the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, would again demonstrate its governing skill if given the opportunity.[203] After visiting Warsaw, Naumann reported that the Polish nation already encompassed a fully articulated social structure, replete with nobles, capitalists, intellectuals, clerics, artisans, and farmers.[204] Like Massow, he believed that Russian rule had "hemmed in and repressed the potential national development" of Poland.[205] Despite this, he argued that Poles were politically engaged and had already organized several highly influential political parties.[206] In his opinion, Poles were ready to handle the challenges of governing a bourgeois democracy and Warsaw was poised to become a major political center.[207]

Rohrbach was among the most forceful defenders of Polish *Staatsfähigkeit*. This is rather surprising given his vicious defense of colonialism in Africa, which he had justified by ruminating on Africans' supposed intrinsic inability to organize anything but "laughable distortions of European-American" states, or unimpressive polities like Rwanda.[208] Rohrbach made no such claims about that capacity of Polish nationals. In the first years of WWI, Rohrbach repeatedly underscored the history of Polish statehood as proof that Poles were obviously capable of organizing an advanced European state. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had already been a state, indeed a European power.[209] Rohrbach further denied that the disappearance of this state in the 18th century was the result of any crippling flaw in Polish culture. He instead argued that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had owed its decline and eventual partition to an unfortunately balanced social structure. Without a developed middle-class and independent cities to support the monarchy, Rohrbach believed that the Polish nobility had constantly checked efforts by the crown to centralize the state.[210] Jealous Polish nobles, he argued had repeatedly sabotaged the emergence of a middle-class, and worked to prevent the education of the peasantry. "Through the fault of the nobility was the [Polish] nation savaged [*verwildert*], the

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[198] Friedrich Meinecke, "Nationalismus und nationale Idee (1914)," in *Politische Schriften und Reden*, vol. II, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Darmstadt: Siegfried Toeche-Mittler Verlag, 1958), 90; Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 21.
[199] Wilhelm von Massow, "Stimmen zur Polenfrage," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (August 18, 1916): 1461.
[200] Ibid., 1463.
[201] Ibid., 1463–64.
[202] von Massow, *Wie steht es mit Polen?*, 6.
[203] Friedrich Naumann, "Wir und die Polen," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben*, January 1, 1916, 892.
[204] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 33.
[205] Ibid., 2.
[206] Ibid., 33.
[207] Ibid., 2, 33.
[208] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 6–9, 96.
[209] Paul Rohrbach, "Russisches," 1915, 37, R1501/119780, BArch.
[210] Rohrbach, "Polen," November 17, 1916, 2012.

country neglected".[211]

Other multinationalists similarly blamed the decline of the Polish Lithuanian commonwealth on a mixture of contingent military defeats and constitutional defects.[212] In particular, analysts tended to blame the Commonwealth's elective Kingship and *Liberum Veto*, both of which obstructed political centralization and invited foreign intervention during transitions of power.[213] Their diagnoses of Polish-Lithuanian decline were essentially sympathetic. Contemporary Germans were well aware of German Central Europe's own history of political fragmentation and vulnerability to foreign powers. Rohrbach himself faulted overwrought particularism and pursuit of sectional interests for the weakness and decline of the Holy Roman Empire.[214] In the context of their own views on German history, multinationalist analyses of Poland's 18th century collapse read not as a sneering denunciation of Polish idiocy, but as a cautionary tale against factional strife.

Rohrbach further insisted that the destabilizing imbalances of Polish society had already been resolved. The present social conditions of the Polish nation, he insisted, differed completely from those of the pre-partition era. Even in the repressive and economically laggard Russian Poland, Rohrbach affirmed that Poles had developed a capable middle-class, which could effectively take on political responsibility.[215] A Polish state constructed out of Russia's partition would possess a "modern", "healthy and viable" social and economic structure and would not, he contended, suffer from the same weaknesses of the old Commonwealth.[216] Modern Poles, Rohrbach concluded, understood well how "to calculate, to save, and to organize themselves economically and politically".[217] They were, in short, historically and presently *Staatsfähig*.[218]

Multinationalists therefore systematically rejected the colonial interpretation of German-Polish relations espoused by some of their contemporaries. Poland, for them, was not an irredeemably primitive nation in need of German rule. Rather, they considered Poland to have an advanced and resilient national culture, one that had already produced an influential state in central Europe. German multinationalists' perceptions of Poland as a civilized nation proved important for three primary reasons. First, multinationalists concluded that coercive or colonial strategies of ethnic management would be inappropriate or ineffectual in Poland. As a developed, cultured, resilient, and *Staatsfähig* nation, not only was Poland considered worthy of respect and preservation, it was also implicitly capable of sustained and organized resistance to foreign rule, resistance which Germans believed black Africans simply could not muster. Rule through raw coercion in Poland, was not an option as it was in Africa. In 1907, Rohrbach had argued that the most adamantine proof of African primitivity was that, "In contrast to whites, the black race allowed itself to be ushered into conditions of bondage similar to domestic animals".[219] Unlike in Africa, Rohrbach believed that the Poles, "nationally disciplined, like no other people in Europe", would fight tirelessly and effectively to preserve their national culture, as Polish Prussians had already long resisted Germanzation.[220] Multinationalists interpreted Polish national culture as an indicator of latent potential for organized and effective political resistance to foreign domination.

Conversely, Poland's status as a civilized and *Staatsfähig* nation made it a potentially invaluable bastion against Russian incursions. Catholic publicists, Adolf Grabowsky, and even Max Sering argued that Poland's national "historical mission" was "the defense of Central Europe and its culture" Russian aggression.[221] Alexander von Guttry went further, stating that

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[211] Paul Rohrbach, "Warschauer Brief," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (December 15, 1916): 2199.
[212] Rüdiger, "Polens Niedergang," *Die Hilfe*, February 4, 1915, 72.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*., 27–28.
[215] Rohrbach, "Polen," November 17, 1916, 2012.
[216] Ibid., 2013.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Hildebrandt arrives at a similar conclusion Hildebrandt, "Polen und Deutschland," 110.
[219] Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft*, 3.
[220] Rohrbach, "Polen," November 17, 1916, 2013; Rohrbach, "Russisches," 37.
[221] Jakob Obermans S.J., "Die Erfüllung der polnischen Sehnsucht," *Stimmen der Zeit* 92 (1916): 390; Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage*, 38–39, 74; Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 26.

Poland's historic "service" to Europe had their successful expansion of "occidental culture" eastward through the conquests of the Jagiellonian dynasty.[222] Even as Polish capability limited what strategies of rule Multinationalists were willing to endorse, it is simultaneously what painted Poland as a valuable client to multinationalists, so long as they believed that collaboration between Poland and Germany was sustainable.

Finally, multinationalists presented Poland's historic cultural productivity as a prima facie justification for the salvation of Polish nationhood from Russian 'barbarism'. Multinationalists appreciated cultural diversity as conducive to occidental creativity and human progress. In the earliest weeks of the war, Paul Rohrbach uttered his battle-cry, staking out Germany's mission to defend European *cultures* from Russian attack. "Be gone with Tsarism from all territories which were by their nature determined for the occidental cultural community, and which only came to Russia illegally".[223]

To Make the Baltics German: Adjusting Imperial Strategies to Local Ethnic Conditions

It is worth asking whether multinationalist perceptions of Poland as a civilized nation actually influenced their strategy for the region. That is, did multinationalists seek to build a Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty because they recognized Polish national culture, or did they portray Poland as civilized in order to build support for their preferred agenda? Two indicators suggest that multinationalists genuinely believed their rhetoric of Polish cultural sophistication, and that this assumption informed their development of Polish policy. First, several authors asserted Poland's status as a civilized nation even before the outbreak of WWI had reopened the Polish question.[224] Secondly, Polish culture's central role in motivating multinationalism can be seen by comparing multinationalists' proposals for governing populations that they considered less civilized than Poland.

Germans understood the Baltic region as roughly comparable to Congress Poland in several key respects. Both occupied a strategically important position.German observers also considered both regions too small and too poor to form viable independent states. However, many of the same intellectuals who stalwartly defended the multinationalist ethnic management in Poland simultaneously advocated for the annexation, Germanization, and colonization of the Russian Baltic coast. On some occasions they advocated both proposals within the very same document. That multinationalists were willing to countenance this model of ethnic management along the Baltic coast says much about their reasons for adopting particular strategies in Poland. For one it suggests that concerns over international opinion played a secondary role in multinationalists' cost-benefit analysis for Poland. More importantly, German multinationalists saw no inherent contradiction in pursuing these fundamentally different strategies because they perceived the subject populations in question as essentially different in their cultural sophistication and political resilience. German multinationalists condoned ambitious policies of Germanization because they believed that Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians lacked the cultural sophistication to either justify their continued development, or resist their eclipse by German national culture. In their eyes, this difference licensed, and even necessitated, more invasive policies of German imperial management. Baltic cultures they believed, contributed little to human progress, would not resist German influence, and, just as importantly, could not survive on their own. Their ambitions in the Baltics confirm decisive role that multinationalists' high regard for Polish culture played in motivating their support for the creation of a satellite Kingdom of Poland.

German-speaking communities had resided in the Baltic region for centuries before 1914. Under papal sanction, German crusaders had established Riga as a stronghold in 1201 and begun to conquer surrounding pagan territories. The conquests of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, became Terra Mariana, or Livonia, an ecclesiastical state ruled from the Archbishopric of Riga.

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[222] Aleksander von Guttry, *Die Polen und der Weltkrieg; Ihre politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Russland, Preussen und Österreich* (Munich: G. Müller, 1915), XII.
[223] Paul Rohrbach, "Vom Kriegsziel," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 31 (1914): 939.
[224] Paul Rohrbach, "Deutschlands auswärtige Lage," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (May 17, 1914): 184.

In 1237, the sword-brethren merged with the Teutonic Order, fresh from a series of successful campaigns against the pagan Prussians.[225] By the late 13th century, the Teutonic Order controlled a substantial ecclesiastical state, encompassing what is today Northern Poland, Latvia, and Estonia.[226] In 1525, Grand Master Albrecht von Hohenzollern had secularized the Teutonic Order's Prussian territories and recognized Polish supremacy over Ducal Prussia.[227] The Livonian half of the *Ordensstaat* was itself partitioned in the mid-16th century between the Swedish Empire and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Russian Empire subsequently seized most of the Baltic Littoral with the conclusion of the Great Northern War in 1721, and annexed the remainder by the end of the 18th century.[·]

Before their fall, the Grand Masters had supported ambitious colonization projects, issuing hundreds of land grants and privileges to settlers in the 13th century.[228] A large class of German nobles had therefore emerged in the Teutonic period. As the Baltic Littoral changed hands, this German landowning nobility, remained in place. The Tsars had initially allowed them to maintain their traditional privileges and autonomy, and the German nobles occupied influential social positions as aristocratic landowners, professionals, and provincial and imperial officials.[229] The political fortunes of Baltic Germans declined precipitously in that late 19th century. The 1863 emancipation of Russia's serfs and nascent industrialization both contributed to the growth of Latvian-speaking working and middle classes with grievances against Baltic German social elites.[230] St. Petersburg had adopted policies of political and educational Russification in the 1880s, acutely threatening the Baltic Germans' traditional social and political influence. Such policies had severely disaffected many Baltic Germans, who considered themselves loyal subjects of the Tsar now wrongly persecuted. By 1914, large communities of Baltic Germans remained in Kurland, Livland, and Estland.[231]

The Baltic coast offered a tempting strategic prize for German multinationalists. As with Poland, Germans of all political inclinations hoped that control over the Baltics would reinforce Germany's Eastern frontier against future Russian attacks.[232] Across the political spectrum, Germans worried about the German Empire's ability to feed itself and support the continued growth of its population. Conversely many feared that Russia's rapidly growing population, fed by its apparently limitless space, might one day overwhelm Germany in a 'Slavic flood'. Even before the war, Paul Rohrbach had worried that Germany, confined in a relatively small geographic space in Central Europe, faced an imminent ceiling on demographic growth based on its limited agricultural capacity and dependence on imports.[233] Later, Rohrbach fretted that Germany's demographic growth, at roughly 800,000 per year, was sluggish and would continue to slow given the German Empire's relative lack the "opportunities for large spatial expansion".[234] Rohrbach had thus favored Germany's acquisition of more agricultural territory for the purpose of securing a stable food supply for the growing German population.[235]

Britain's wartime blockade seemed to vindicate this concern for nutritional security. Managing population growth through urbanization and industrialization, Rohrbach concluded, had failed to expand Germany's capacity to produce food domestically and rendered the Empire

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[225] Paul W. Knoll, "The Most Unique Crusader State: The Teutonic Order in the Development of the Political Culture of Northeastern Europe during the Middle Ages," in *The Germans and the East* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 38.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid., 43.
[·] By 1914, St. Petersburg had organized the Baltic Littoral into the three governorates of Estonia, Livonia, and Courland, and the abutting, primarily Lithuanian governorate of Kovno and Vilna.
[228] Knoll, "The Most Unique Crusader State," 38.
[229] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 33.
[230] Ibid., 31.
[231] Ibid., 33.
[232] Paul Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 28 (July 10, 1915): 912.
[233] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 8–9.
[234] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 908; Rohrbach, "Das Kriegsziel im Schützengraben," 244.
[235] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 10.

vulnerable to British naval power.[236] In the verdant reaches of the northwest Russian Empire, Rohrbach and others saw a perfect opportunity to resolve this vulnerability. To seize this territory, Rohrbach noted, would cripple the Russian Empire, while simultaneously granting Germany "space" [*Raum*] for the "organic growth of German national soil [*Volksboden*] and the German nation".[237] Later, Rohrbach wrote of this "Baltic colonial-land" as one of the great zones for future German expansion.[238] Friedrich Meinecke agreed that "Our objective is to drive back Russia and to create a new settlement land for German peasants…".[239] Annexing the Baltics would do more than establish a firm defensive line against the Russian Empire, it would secure Germany's national future.

In contrast to Poland, German multinationalists believed that the inhabitants of the Baltic coast lacked some or all of the traits associated with civilized nationhood. The considered the region to be startlingly under-populated and economically underdeveloped, a *res nullius* ripe for German settlers to claim. Most importantly, they believed that the extant Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian inhabitants lacked cultural sophistication, political awareness, and *Staatsfähigkeit*. Consequently, multinationalist believed that, under exemplary governance, these Baltic populations would readily adopt German culture.

Prominent multinationalists imagined the Baltic coast and its hinterland as a verdant and empty expanse, ready to receive millions of German settlers. While Lithuania and the Baltic provinces of Russia together constituted roughly one third of the landmass of Germany, Rohrbach calculated that these fertile lands supported less than one tenth of Germany's population.[240] The Russian northwest, he insisted, could easily support a doubled or trebled population.[241] Much of this territory was held directly by the Russian state as domains or forests. As title to these lands would transfer to Berlin with annexation, Rohrbach noted gleefully that Germany could distribute parcels of land to German colonists without expropriating any resident non-German populations.[242] The military evacuation of much of the region's civilian population during Russia's 'Great Retreat' in 1915 had also extensively depopulated the region, leaving many lands open for postwar settlement. Rohrbach estimated that the Russian evacuations had reduced the population of Courland by more than half, from 750 thousand to approximately 300 thousand.[243] German colonization would therefore not require heavy-handed measures against the extant population. It would be a perfect destination, he claimed, for disaffected German subjects of the Russian Empire seeking to emigrate from Russia after the war.[244] For multinationalists the emptiness of this space was its first virtue. Thinkers like Paul Rohrbach did not imagine that the German Empire was seizing densely populated and highly developed territories. Rather, he imagined it as moving into a thinly held space, and believed the German colonization could be orchestrated to maintain harmony with the resident non-German populations.

In contrast to their assessments of Polish Nationhood, few multinationalists were impressed by Baltic cultures. Rohrbach, Schiemann, and other multinationalist thinkers explicitly considered the ethnicities of the region as qualitatively more primitive than Poland. Paul Rohrbach and Theodor Schiemann were personally familiar with the region. Rohrbach had been born in Schrunden [Skrunda] in Courland. The elder Theodor Schiemann hailed from Grobin, closer to the Baltic coast of Courland. Both had attended the University of Dorpat. Schiemann claimed that "Latvians lack their own culture (as for example, the *Poles* and Danes of Germany)".[245] Paul Rohrbach quite explicitly differentiated between Polish nationhood and what

[236] Rohrbach, "Das Kriegsziel im Schützengraben," 244.
[237] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 914.
[238] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 74.
[239] Meinecke, "Präliminarien der Kriegsziele," 1013–14.
[240] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 910.
[241] Freiherr von Mackay, "Kriegsziele – Kriegserkenntnis II," *Das größere Deutschland*, September 25, 1915, 1262.
[242] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 910.
[243] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 76.
[244] Ibid., 75.
[245] Theodore Schiemann, "Die Letten," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (October 1, 1916): 1760.

he considered the primitive cultures of the Baltics.[246] Rohrbach appreciated nations as engines of cultural progress, dynamos that produced unique contributions to the material and intellectual advancement of humanity. He therefore considered the preservation of nations like Poland as essential for the rapid "progress of humanity" [*Menschheitsfortschritts*].[247] However, Rohrbach also considered the obverse of this postulate valid: if a given culture had not contributed to human progress, he held that it had no claim to preservation. Such reasoning in part justified his support for displacing autochthonous African populations. In the Baltics, Rohrbach believed that the native Latvian, Estonian, Byelorussian, and Lithuanian cultures had so far failed to produce any notable cultural achievements. To his understanding, Latvian and Estonian culture lacked any literary or political tradition comparable to Polands', and had not yet produced a substantial class of vernacular elites.[248] Ergo, he saw no compelling reason to preserve or institutionally support their national development.

Whereas multinationalists had frequently emphasized Poland's historic success in organizing a European state, their readings of Baltic history cast natives as culturally and politically incapable objects.[249] They saw no record of Baltic *Staatsfähigkeit* or local cultural productivity, but rather believed that medieval German colonization had introduced virtually all social and material innovations to the region. For Rohrbach, German culture had not historically displaced or competed with Baltic culture, it had filled a void. Rohrbach frequently expounded upon the history of the "Baltenland" as a "colony of the old German Empire", which German crusaders, missionaries, merchants, and farmers had indelibly stamped with German language, religion, culture, and architecture.[250] Rohrbach considered this influence readily apparent in the landscape. Exemplary was his 1916 *Das Baltenbuch*, a large format collection of illustrations and photographs of the Baltic landscape and its peoples, accompanied by German essays. Rohrbach presented the collection as a showcase of the Baltic "German cities", their castles, churches, and apparently Teutonic architecture.[251] The Baltic provinces, in his view, "belonged historically and culturally" to Europe by dint of German influence.[252]

Rohrbach and Schiemann believed that German colonization had established essentially all of the cultural norms in the region. Indeed, Schiemann believed that Latvians had already adopted German norms and attitudes and were essentially "German peasants, that speak Latvian".[253] Rohrbach pointed out that the region's socio-political organization was modeled on medieval German estate constitutions. Baltic Germans, he noted, still directed local administration, courts, and schools, and had ensconced German as the legal language until the advent Russification policies.[254] Though the peasantry of Livonia might speak Latvian, he argued that they had adopted the settlement patterns and farming techniques imported by the Teutonic knights centuries before. Farmers, he emphasized, settled on "individual farmsteads" [*Einzelhöfe*] rather than in the communal villages common to Slavic and Lithuanian communities.[255] The Baltic peasantry, like their German neighbors, had broken with the Catholic Church during the reformation, and therefore already shared a confessional identity.[256] "The cities, the nobility, the culture and lifestyles [of Livonia]", Rohrbach insisted, "were German", and this "German essence" had persisted under Polish, Swedish, and even Russian rule.[257] Rohrbach pointed to the University of Dorpat, historically German, as the apogee of German achievement

[246] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 909.
[247] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.*, 6.
[248] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 909.
[249] Silvio Broedrich-Kurmahlen, "Das neue Ostland" (Ostlandverlag, August 28, 1915), 73–78, N30/34, BArch.
[250] Paul Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (September 4, 1915): 1162.
[251] Paul Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch: Die baltische Provinzen und ihre deutsche Kultur, mit Beiträgen hervorragender Balten und vielen Bildern* (Dachau: Der gelbe Verlag Walter Blumtritt, 1916).
[252] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 909.
[253] Schiemann, "Die Letten," 1760.
[254] Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," 1165; Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch*, 4.
[255] Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch*, 60.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid., 4.

in the region.[258] Claiming that Baltic cultures were culturally unproductive undercut the legitimacy of local national autonomy and asserted Germany's right to govern the region.

Because they considered Baltic cultures primitive, Rohrbach, Schiemann, and other multinationalists believed that Berlin could Germanize the local populations with relative ease. In contrast to Poland, multinationalists believed that Baltic traditions lacked sufficiently sophisticated cultures to retain native sympathies in the face of German competition. They were confident that the appeal of German culture would entice most Balts to assimilate of their own volition. Moreover, seeing little history of Baltic *Staatsfähigkeit*, many multinationalists concluded that Latvian, Estonian, Byelorussian, and even Lithuanian cultures had not generated nationally aware political elites capable of organizing sustained resistance to Germanization. Paul Rohrbach explicitly contrasted the Polish nation, possessed of its own native high culture, with Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian ethnicities.[259] He openly dismissed the latter as underdeveloped, and therefore concluded that most Balts would be quick to adopt the obviously superior German culture, or were at least unlikely to resist "gradual Germanization".[260] Courland, for instance, could be completely Germanized in the span of two generations. He held out roughly similar prospects for Lithuania, Estonia, and Livonia.[261] Schiemann likewise believed that, despite their apparent "reservation" about German occupation, Baltic populations would be unlikely to resist German annexation.[262] He contended that Balts would readily complete their conversion by learning the German language. To prosecute this Germanization, he recommended the creation of parallel German and Latvian primary school systems. Baltic universities and institutions of higher education were only to instruct in German, essentially forcing Latvians to learn German for social mobility.[263]

Interested multinationalists argued that submission to German rule and absorption into German culture represented Native Balts' only practical alternative to Russification. They so thoroughly dismissed Baltic traditions that they imagined the region as something like a cultural vacuum, an object of contest for Germany and Muscovy. Paul Rohrbach wrote of the Baltic coast as a centuries-old borderland between the German and Russian "essences" [*Wesen*]. "Germans" and "Russians", Rohrbach held, had struggled and battled since 1242 to project their influence over Livonia and its residents, always described as passive objects of this national struggle.[264] Indeed, Rohrbach considered WWI only the most recent conflict in a millennial struggle between Germans and Russians over the region.[265] Both Rohrbach and Schiemann considered the native Baltic cultures essentially doomed in this struggle, consigned to integrate into the German or Russian spheres.[266] Of course, both also believed Germanization to be the better option for Baltic natives. Rohrbach, for instance, never tired of claiming that the successful German colonization of Livonia had elevated the region to one of the most cultivated and economically productive regions of the Russian Empire.[267] He insisted that German residents had defended their culture in the centuries since Peter the Great, and the control of the local government by the Baltic Barons had preserved the territory from the worst of Russian mismanagement.[268] Without the, "colonization of the whole region" through the Catholic Church and the German order, he claimed, Russian barbarism might have contaminated the cultural institutions and social structures of the Baltic coast.[269] Their preservation of their own German identity, religious, social, and political institutions, Rohrbach claimed, had been the great "service of the Baltic Germans", as it had simultaneously preserved the occidental nature of this region and prevented its fall to

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[258] Ibid.; Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," 1165.
[259] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 916.
[260] Ibid., 910, 916.
[261] Ibid., 911.
[262] Schiemann, "Die Letten," 1759–60.
[263] Ibid., 1761.
[264] Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," 1165.
[265] Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch*, 3.
[266] Schiemann, "Die Letten," 1760.
[267] Paul Rohrbach, "Vorbemerkung zu 'Das baltische Deutschtum,'" *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 22, 1915): 686.
[268] Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," 1163–66.
[269] Ibid., 1165.

Russian barbarism.[270] He understood WWI as a fateful moment for the Baltics, in which German civilization or Russian barbarism would finally claim the region.

Though concerned with the extension and nourishment of the German nation, Rohrbach emphasized that German national presence in the Baltics performed a "service" to European civilization by staunching the historical advance of Russian culture westward.[271] Self-interest and European integrity converged in the German Empire's possession of the Baltic region, where German culture achieved what Rohrbach assumed native cultures couldn't: political capability (*staatsfähigkeit*) and cultural consolidation of the region.

Unlike in Poland, multinationalists like Rohrbach and Schiemann recommended that the German Empire directly annex Baltic territories and support the linguistic Germanization of the region, as well as the colonization of under-populated regions by ethnic-German refugees from the Russian Empire. In May 1915, Rohrbach proposed to directly annex the Baltic provinces to the German Empire and romantically rename the whole territory "Livonia" [*Livland*].[272] Germany would annex Courland, Livonia, and Estonia as a uniform whole, and likewise take control of Lithuania as a "territory of interest" [*Interessengebiet*].[273] He considered the "growth of German territory along the Baltic coast and in its immediate hinterland" to be of the utmost importance because "here alone" could German "security against Russia be won".[274] These annexations would create a "steadfastly German Land… extending to the vast strategic border of Lake Peipus," and would create a fortified line that would "secure Germany and its allies from an inundation of the Russian millions…".[275] "We hope and we trust," Rohrbach wrote, "that the Baltic provinces will again be a land of German settlement".[276] Schiemann fully agreed, further supporting the annexation of Courland to Germany.[277]

German multinationalists prescribed such a strikingly different strategy for extending imperial influence into the Baltics because they considered the ethno-political conditions of the region essentially different. In Polish nationhood, they perceived a highly developed culture which had made literary and scientific contributions to humanity, one which they believed could foster effective native governance, or just as easily inspire organized resistance to German rule. The Polish nation represented a potentially valuable ally in a greater imperial project or a potentially dangerous opponent. But many of these same thinkers did not believe that the underdeveloped Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, or White Ruthenian traditions warranted preservation. They concluded that these cultures had not produced a *Staatsfähig* native elite, and that Berlin would encounter little resistance to annexing and Germanizing the region.

This contrast between Polish nationhood and Baltic underdevelopment appeared frequently in wartime discussions about German objectives along the Baltic coast. Within the same memorandum that they submitted in support of German Suzerainty over Poland, Breslau university professors justified the annexation and colonization of Courland, Livonia, Estonia, and Lithuania because local "national and religious relationships" were more conducive to assimilation.[278] In 1916, Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, penned an article supporting the annexation of the Baltic provinces (including Lithuania) as a "border-adjacent settlement-colony" for the German Empire.[279] He justified his position by noting that the region was thinly populated, and therefore susceptible to gradual Germanization through colonization. He contrasted this to the situation in Poland, a territory which he considered completely populated. There Germanization would be an unrealistic goal.

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[270] Ibid., 1167; Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch*, 5.
[271] Rohrbach, "Baltische Geschichte," 1167.
[272] Rohrbach, "Vorbemerkung zu 'Das baltische Deutschtum,'" 687.
[273] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 75.
[274] Rohrbach, "An Scheideweg der deutschen Zukunft," 909.
[275] Ibid., 912.
[276] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 74.
[277] Schiemann, "Die Letten," 1759.
[278] Alfred Hillebrandt and Johannes Nikel, "Memorandum Submitted by Faculty of the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office," November 1915, 134, R 21575, PA AA.
[279] Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, "An der Schwelle des dritten Kriegsjahres," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (September 1, 1916): 1561.

In Congress Poland, consensus reigned among multinationalists that Germany should foster a strong and autonomous Polish Kingdom as a permanent ally of the German Empire. In discussions of imperial policy in the Baltic provinces, however, multinationalist opinion split, with several prominently renouncing annexations. Tellingly, they disagreed with Rohrbach's and Schiemann's proposals precisely because they disputed their portrayal of Baltic cultures.[280] Naumann, for instance, admired that the Lithuanian, Estonian, and Polish nations had all defended a strong sense of national culture despite their difficult geographic positions, exposed as "peoples-in-between" [*Zwischenvölker*] the titanic forces of Germanic and Russian influence.[281] Axel Schmidt accepted the mythology of Germans' historic role as *Kulturträger* in the Baltics.[282] However, he argued that German colonists had, out of "colonial pride" and a desire to maintain their ruling status, erected a strong social "partition" between the German elite and native subalterns.[283] He regretted that this deliberately cultivated social distinction had prevented the Germanization of formerly receptive local populations.[284] Latvians and Estonians, he emphasized, had by now codified written languages and cultivated an educated vernacular elite. Most importantly, these cultural communities had produced nationally conscious political movements. Latvia and Estonia, he concluded, had joined the ranks of political nations, thus rendering any attempts to Germanize these populations both impractical and ethically dubious.[285] Axel Schmidt therefore opposed annexation. The German nation, he believed, had missed its opportunity to subsume the Baltic peoples. Nonetheless Latvian and Estonian nations had emerged from "western European soil", and therefore belonged to the occidental community.[286] He implied that the German Empire might sponsor Baltic secession from the Russian Empire, and somehow shield the resulting states from Tsarist influence in the future. Meinecke similarly counseled against annexations in the Baltics, recommending instead incorporating the region into the multinational imperial structure as "confederated small states".[287]

Thinkers like Rohrbach and Schiemann lobbied for the annexation and Germanization of the Baltics because they deemed this the most effective strategy for securing the German Empire's permanent control of the region. They considered Germanization possible here because they believed the Latvian, Estonian, Byelorussian, and even Lithuanian cultures to be underdeveloped. By this they meant that these communities had not yet produced literary, artistic, or scientific achievements sufficient to inspire the loyalty of Baltic residents. More importantly, they believed that these cultures had not yet generated vernacular elites or political movements large and sophisticated enough to coordinate resistance to Germanization. No local Baltic political associations would organize financial resources to prevent the sale of land to German settlers. There would be no Baltic nationalists to organize school associations, and erect a parallel education system to compete with the German option. Through colonization and education, the Baltic cultures would quietly disappear, suffused into the German Empire. Germany would thereby claim a massive swathe of territory, whose agricultural productivity could support the Empire's growing population for the foreseeable future.

Rohrbach believed that the Baltic peoples occupied an intermediate status between civilized nations like Germany and Poland, and the barbaric races of Africa. Though he dismissed the Baltic cultures as unproductive, he believed that the actual people of the Baltics could be easily assimilated, and were indeed already basically German. Unlike black Africans, who he dismissed as irredeemably primitive, Rohrbach did not believe that Balts were racially incapable of culture. Though their own traditions could not produce independent states, or contribute to human progress, Rohrbach believed that the people were themselves capable of adopting German cultural norms and fully assimilating.

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[280] Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat*, 29.
[281] Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," 481.
[282] Axel Schmidt, "Das baltische Deutschtum," *Das größere Deutschland*, 1915, 26.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., 27.
[287] Meinecke, "Letter to Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz, 30 August 1914," 197.

Consequently, even as Rohrbach recommended the annexation and colonization of this region in order to fortify the agricultural and demographic resources of the German Empire, he never advocated that Germany apply the methods of rule that it had developed in its African colonies. Though he supported *colonization*, Rohrbach continued to recommend the assimilation of Baltic populations and not their removal. Nor did he endorse the creation of legally distinct *colonial* ethnic categories. Rohrbach and Schiemann considered Baltic populations underdeveloped enough to both justify and facilitate Germanization, but not racially distinct or irredeemably primitive. Multinationalists did not support ethnic cleansing or deportations simply because they didn't feel that this was necessary. Nor was their pursuit of Germanization guided by an ideology of racial superiority. Indeed, those multinationalists who appreciated a level of cultural sophistication among Baltic populations quickly renounced Germanization as impractical. Thinkers like Axel Schmidt were not willing to cross moral thresholds into deportations or violence, especially not while other, multinational, avenues of security remained feasible. Both pro-Germanizers, like Rohrbach, and anti-Germanizers, like Schmidt, laid plans in the Baltics based on a calculation of what strategy of ethnic management would best serve German security interests.

However, because they considered Germanization of the Polish nation impossible, Rohrbach and Schiemann opted for a more appropriate strategy of ethnic management: multinationalism. Multinationalist ambitions to construct an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty did not veil deeper plans to gradually project a form of cultural imperialism into Eastern Europe. Quite the opposite, multinationalists supported Polish autonomy because they had resigned themselves to the apparent reality that Poland was a civilized and *Staatsfähig* nation.

Conclusion

German multinationalists were not principled opponents of colonialism. Among their ranks were devotees and even zealots of colonialism, many of whom were personally familiar with Germany's brutal methods of rule in Africa. Paul Rohrbach's involvement in the mass murder of the Herero and Nama people, for instance, in no way softened his support for violent and repressive forms of colonial rule. But German colonial practices did not automatically inform imperial projects in Europe. Proponents of colonialism did not necessarily consider colonial strategies of rule appropriate for extending Germany's influence on the European continent. Multinationalist intellectuals and publicists considered the ethnic conditions in Eastern Europe wholly inappropriate for such policies.

While nationalist circles certainly attempted to discursively frame Poland as colonial space, large and influential segments of the German political public clearly rejected depictions of Poles as colonial subjects before and during the war. Multinationalists understood Poland as an occidental *Staatsnation*, with a productive culture and a proven track record of self-governance and political organization. They saw in Polish nationalist politics a capacity to stalwartly resist coercive imperialism, or effectively defend Germany's eastern border. They crafted their policy prescriptions accordingly. Multinationalist proposals for projecting imperial influence over Congress Poland eschewed colonial models of systematic repression and exploitation, and instead focused on the institutionalization and empowerment of the Polish nation in the form of a state under German suzerainty.

Comparing proposals for ethnic management articulated by intellectuals like Paul Rohrbach and Theodor Schiemann for Congress Poland and the Russian Baltics confirms the central role of the perceived *Kulturfähigkeit* and *Staatsfähigkeit* of native populations in shaping imperial preferences. Multinationalist intellectuals considered the Polish nation sufficiently advanced and organized to resist Germanization, and therefore promoted multinational incorporation. Many German thinkers did not perceive the same highly developed vernacular elite or sense of national identity among the ethnic communities of the Baltics. Believing that Berlin could Germanize these regions with relative ease, thinkers like Rohrbach and Schiemann therefore advocated its direct annexation to the German Empire.

Carefully disentangling and differentiating German imperialists' perceptions of Eastern

European peoples yields several important results. The strong connection between German perceptions of native cultures and differing strategies of imperial management complicates the link between intellectuals' contemporary interests in expanding German *Lebensraum* and policies of deportation and ethnic cleansing. Multinationalists like Paul Rohrbach, with his extensive background in colonial administration, petitioned for the expansion of the German Empire on the European continent in order open spaces for German settlement, support continued national demographic growth, and achieve nutritional autarky. Though this agenda bore a strong resemblance to *völkisch* calls for *Lebensraum*, Rohrbach excoriated groups like the Pan-German league. Rohrbach's views on ethnic management ultimately restrained his vision of empire in Eastern Europe. Believing that Baltic populations could be Germanized, he considered their continued residence compatible with the achievement of Germany's economic goals in the region. Indeed, he considered Baltic natives mores economically valuable than politically threatening to the German Empire. Neither the desire for *Lebensraum* nor an interest in propagating German settlement necessarily generated support for deportations or ethnic cleansing.

Finally, in the wartime debates over how to project German influence into Congress Poland, few really contested Polish cultural and political aptitude. There was not an overarching German "mindscape" of Eastern Europe, which dismissed Poles as incapable of self-governance and unworthy of political independence. Such rhetoric was current in descriptions of Baltic populations, but had a limited impact on prescriptions for German rule in Poland. As noted in Chapter 1, nationalizing imperialists, though less complimentary, implicitly agreed with multinationalists that Polish nationals were immanently capable of political organization. Accusations of "Wallenrodism" and plaudits of Polish civilization were two sides of the same coin. Multinationalists, believing that Berlin could recruit Polish nationals as loyal collaborators, saw Polish *Staatsfähigkeit* as an asset. Nationalizing imperialists, fearing that such a reconciliation was impossible, saw it as a threat. Nationalist rhetoric of Polish incapacity masked a deeper fear that Poles, in contrast to other nations in Eastern Europe, could organize effective resistance to German rule.[288] Even Diertrich Schäfer, the vocal publicist of the *Ostmarkenverein*, worried about the potential for a Polish state to compete with German hegemony in Eastern Europe. Unlike in Poland, nationalizing imperialists rarely proposed engineering an ethnically pure "border-strip" along the Baltic coast. Yet if their insistence on nationalizing methods of ethnic management were indeed premised on an aversion to Polish cultural or racial inferiority, one might expect at least some early proponents of such a scheme in a region dismissed by many as culturally negligible. WWI German debates over ethnic management in Poland were fundamentally defined by the question of Polish loyalty, not their competence or inferiority.

[288] Gregor Thum has similarly noted how nationalists' anxieties over the effective resistance of Polish Prussians to Germanization motivated their espousal of more aggressive policies of homogenization. Gregor Thum, "Imperialists in Panic: The Evocation of Empire at Germany's Eastern Frontier around 1900," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear, and Radicalization*, ed. Gregor Thum and Maurus Reinkowski (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 152–53. However, Thum has argued that nationalist rhetoric of Polish cultural inferiority was never fundamentally challenged, largely because Poland remained a marginal issue in Wilhelmine political discourse. Gregor Thum, "Megalomania and Angst: The Nineteenth-Century Mythicization of Germany's Eastern Borderlands," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 44.

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Russian Barbarism and Austrian Salvation

Although multinationalists renounced colonialism as a template for ethnic management in Congress Poland, they did draw upon other precedents to inform their plans for projecting German influence into Eastern Europe. Multinationalist thinkers identified Russia and Austria-Hungary as contrasting archetypes of imperial organization. They denounced the Russian Empire as the brutal apotheosis of nationalizing imperialism. Multinationalists vilified Russia as a "barbaric empire" [*Barbarenreich*] because, they argued, its consistent efforts to homogenize its population constituted an unjustifiable attack on the legitimate nations under Tsarist rule. Conversely, they celebrated the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a laudable, if constitutionally dysfunctional, example of multinational solidarity, a positive vision of productive inter-ethnic harmony to be cautiously imitated. German multinationalists employed portraits of both empires to articulate their own framework for understanding what was at stake in the Great War. By castigating Russia for its antipathy towards other civilized nations, multinationalists established a clear set of ethical parameters for Germany's imperial governance. Conversely, multinationalists admired the Austro-Hungarian Empire for preserving cultural diversity and contributing to human progress. They therefore urged Germany to emulate the tolerant and collaborative ethos of Austro-Hungarian imperialism. Germany and Austri-Hungary, they held, fought heroically to preserve the Polish nation, and indeed the very concept of national pluralism, from Russian vandalism.

Multinationalists' interpretations of inter-ethnic relations in both countries also reinforced their confidence in the plausibility of durable and productive German-Polish collaboration, though for very different reasons. Multinationalists emphasized St. Petersburg's past efforts to Russify its population and the ongoing threat it posed to Polish culture. They argued that Tsarist efforts to marginalize, repress, or homogenize its Polish subjects over the previous decades had convinced Poles that the Russian Empire constituted an urgent threat to the future of Polish national culture. They argued that Poles would therefore accept Germany's military and political leadership as necessary to stave off this looming menace and preserve Polish nationhood. Alternatively German multinationalists interpreted Austria-Hungary's continuing integrity during the war as strong evidence for the possibility of multinational stability. German multinationalists pointed to their neighbor as proof that national identity alone did not determine political loyalty, and that multinationalism remained a viable model of imperial organization.

Germans' wartime interpretations of neighboring empires are often cited as proof of the pervasive sense of cultural superiority incubated in German political culture and the stubborn commitment of German intellectuals and publicists to national homogenization. German portrayals of Russia as barbaric have lately been subject to considerable scholarly attention. Historians have almost invariably interpreted wartime rhetoric of Russian barbarism as evidence of Germany's increasingly radical and racialized perception of Eastern Europe. Denunciations of Russian barbarism are cited as yet another inheritance of colonial experience in Africa, proof that attitudes of racial superiority had permeated the Afro-European barrier and were now being used to assert, dominate, and colonize Eastern Europe.[1] Others have interpreted this rhetoric of Russian barbarism as a German version of "orientalism" in the tradition of Edward Said and Larry Wolff.[2] Troy Paddock has argued that wartime accusations of Russian "barbarism" manifested a longer German intellectual tradition, a mounting "oriental *Feindbild*" of Russia as

[1] See especially Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 67; Gregor Thum, "Ex oriente lux - ex oriente furor. Einführung," in *Traumland Osten: deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert.*, ed. Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006), 8–11.

[2] See especially Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).Larry Wolff, note that he believes this is an 18th century trans-european enlightenment project

an inferior Asiatic nation and threatening brute.[3] Through wide-ranging examinations of pre-war textbooks and newspapers, Paddock has demonstrated that Germans routinely portrayed Russia as a hopelessly barbaric nation, and used these depictions to highlight the superiority of German civilization.[4] 19th century German academics and journalists frequently referred to the "coarseness" of the Russian masses, their exotic traditions and inferior morals.[5] Germans, Paddock argues, understood the Russian peasantry in increasingly racialized terms as primitive, lazy, and dirty, and Russian history as a series of failures by irredeemably primitive Slavs to imitate European culture.[6] He further contends that German writers marshaled these negative portrayals to highlight the German Empire's legitimacy as an efficient and organic nation-state by contrast with the caricature of a hopelessly disorganized and febrile Russian multinational empire.[7] Such depictions served nationalizing agendas.[8] Paddock thus understands the rhetoric of Russian barbarism as reinforcing the belief that Germany had a natural mission to carry *Kultur* into the unenlightened East, or even that Germans and Slavs were locked in a quasi-racial struggle.[9]

Vejas Liulevicius has also integrated rhetoric of Russian barbarism into a longer narrative of German colonial ambitions in Eastern Europe. Liulevicius argues that Russia's 1914 offensives into East Prussia terrified and panicked the German public, which responded by penning exaggerated accounts of Russian brutality against civilians.[10] The essence of Russian barbarism in German discourse, Liulevicius argues, thereafter focused on inhuman military atrocities and the apocalyptically violent "Cossack regiments".[11] Like Paddock, Liulevicius argues that Germans deliberately contrasted this barbarism with the *Kultur* of Germany's civilizing mission in Eastern Europe, and reinforced a racialized view of the East as an inferior and colonial space.[12]

Although references to Russian barbarity permeated German wartime discourse, historians have thus far largely ignored the contested and multivalent nature of this rhetoric. The content of this 'barbarity', what specific behaviors the term was used to indict, has been downplayed in favor of emphasizing the apparent dehumanization of enemies. This has once again reinforced the portrayal of Wilhelmine political discourse as obsessed with national homogeneity. Indeed, historians have even interpreted the anti-Russian rhetoric of Rohrbach, Schiemann, Delbrück, and Meinecke as serving to glorify the German nation-state by juxtaposition with Russian multinationalism.[13]

However depictions of Russia as barbaric also served multinationalist ends. During the war, German multinationalists identified Russia's apparent hostility to national diversity, as well as its policies of homogenization, as the core of Russian barbarism. They employed this *Feindbild* of Russia in pursuit of two key aims. As has already been discussed above, multinationalist writers genuinely feared Russian expansionism as perhaps the greatest threat to both German and Polish security. Framing the conflict as a crusade to liberate Poland from the

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[3] Troy Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War" (University of California at Berkeley, 1994), 18; Troy Paddock, "Creating an Oriental Feindbild," *Central European History* 39, no. 2 (June 2006): 221.
[4] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 237.
[5] Ibid., 102, 136.
[6] Ibid., 124–25, 143–47, 152–53, 169–71, 215.
[7] Ibid., 141.
[8] Ibid., 309–14.
[9] Ibid., 61, 181, 195. It is important to note here that Paddock does, on occasion, mention that some German observers understood the Russian Empire as repressive to other nationalities (Ibid., 138, 245.). However, this motif is usually subsumed in his discussions of the increasingly racial connotations of this discourse. The narrow focus of this analysis is perhaps most evident in his treatment of Paul Rohrbach, who, he argues, decried Russian repression of Polish culture mainly to signal support for ethnic Germans living in the Russian Empire (Ibid., 307.).
[10] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, "Der Osten als apokalyptischer Raum: Deutsche Frontwahrnehmungen im und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Traumland Osten: Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2006), 47–48.
[11] Ibid., 53.
[12] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East, 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5; Liulevicius, "Der Osten als apokalyptischer Raum," 48, 61–62.
[13] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 298, 309, 322.

oppressive barbarism of the Russian Empire fulfilled an integrative function. This narrative soothed German fears of Polish disloyalty by emphasizing the mutual interest of the German Empire and Polish nation in military union. Petrograd became a common enemy against which the nations of Central Europe needed to rally.

Just as importantly, the Russian *Feindbild* functioned as an alterior image of the German Empire. In multinationalist portrayals, the Russian *Barbarenreich* represented an inverted and monstrous image of their ideal European order. German multinationalists used depictions of Russia to vilify practices that they deemed antithetical to civilization and good imperial governance, practices which were unacceptable for Berlin. In their portrayals, Russia deviated into barbarism by attempting to repress or stamp out other national cultures. These German observers used depictions of Russian governance to frame WWI as a grand battle of organizational ideas. Germany's multinational leadership, tolerant and liberating, thus sparred with its doppelgänger, a repressive, Russifying, and expansionist Pan-Slavism. This denunciation of Russian "barbarism" simultaneously painted the ideology and methods of Pan-Germans and other national chauvinists as "barbaric" and unworthy of the German civilization.

How Germans evaluated the Austria-Hungary as an imperial model has received less historiographical attention recently. Historians have generally abandoned the notion that the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed because its multiethnic status made it inherently weak. Several scholars have instead stressed the remarkable capacity of the Austro-Hungarian army to endure severe material and nutritional shortages through years of grueling warfare.[14] One historian has even suggested that the Austro-Hungarian army cohered better than their French and Russian rivals, managing as it did to avoid the mass mutinies that both powers experienced, despite roughly equivalent losses.[15] Only with mounting defeats at the front and near-starvation at home did the Austro-Hungarian Empire come undone.[16] Though understandings of Austro-Hungarian collapse have undergone a fundamental shift, portrayals of German-Austrian relations have remained relatively static. German observers are generally portrayed as dismissive of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, if not overtly hostile to its multinational structure. Some historians have argued that German nationalists used multinational Austria-Hungary as a foil to further legitimize the Prusso-German nation-state.[17] A notable exception, Jan Vermeiren has acknowledged that South German and left-liberal intellectuals praised Austria-Hungary during the war in order to propagate a more statist vision of political organization. However, Vermeiren closely links sympathetic portrayals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with authors' interest in closer political and economic relationship specifically between Berlin and Vienna, i.e. *mitteleuropäisch* or quasi-*großdeutsch* projects. His research has paid less attention to how German observers employed the example of Austria-Hungary to inform broader models of ethnic management and imperial structure.[18]

Of course many German nationalists did vocally criticize the multinational structure of the Dual Monarchy, emphasizing that the subversive nationalist movements of the Monarchy's many ethnicities threatened to tear the Austro-Hungarian Empire apart. One author expressed a typical view when he described Austria-Hungary as an "artificial construction" whose "individual nationalities had completely lost any common state-consciousness over long decades of the worst strife".[19] However, German multinationalists contested this discourse, challenging their countrymen to reevaluate the Austro-Hungarian Empire. To them, Austria-Hungary's early

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[14] Gunther E. Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the First World War: 1914-1918," in *The Habsburg Empire in World War I. Essays on the Intellectual, Military, Political and Economic Aspects of the Habsburg War Effort*, ed. Robert A. Kann, Béla A. Király, and Paula S. Fichtner (New York: East European Quarterly, 1977), 82.
[15] Ibid., 78.
[16] See Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in WWI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[17] Paddock, "German Perceptions of Russia before the First World War," 106.
[18] Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 8, 90–100. Vermeiren suggests that Germans initially celebrated Austria-Hungary as a potentially useful and competent ally, but rarely portrayed the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a broader imperial template for Germany. He describes these latter voices as relatively uninfluential.
[19] F.A. Geißler, "Wie der Krieg uns zusammenschmiedete," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 5, 1914): 642.

war experiences were a success-story. From 1914 to 1916, German multinationalists celebrated the Austro-Hungarian Empire as empirical proof of the functionality of multi-ethnic political structures. Though they continued to criticize Austria-Hungary's dualist constitution, German observers pointed to the Habsburg monarchy's successful mobilization to evince the viability of long-term multinational collaboration. The cohesion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire undercut the pessimistic predictions of German nationalists who had suggested that its multinational composition would generate disloyalty and lead to the empire's eventual collapse. It thereby appeared to discredit the strongest argument offered by nationalists against multinational systems of ethnic management: the axiom that national heterogeneity implied political disloyalty and instability. Indeed, the Austro-Hungarian Empire inspired some German observers, suggesting a model for what they hoped the German Empire might become in the future. For some, emulating the Austro-Hungarian Empire offered a route for reclaiming an essential aspect of German national identity that had been minimized after unification in 1871.

Vandalism: Nationalizing Imperialism as the Core of Russian "Barbarism"

Multinationalists used the term "barbarism" to criticize the Russian Empire's efforts to homogenize or repress national diversity. Their portmanteau "Russification-barbarism" [*Russifizierungsbarbarei*] clearly indicates this intent.[20] They focused their criticism specifically on St. Petersburg's late 19th century policies of Russification, the Russian Empire's wartime management of ethnic minorities, and, after 1915, the Russian army's "great retreat". German multinationalists vilified the Russian Empire for its history of abusing its non-Russian Slavic minorities. They excoriated Russia's intensive efforts to stabilize imperial rule through homogenization policies in education and land ownership as the apogee of "barbarism".

German multinationalists were particularly critical of the Russian Empire's persecution of its Polish subjects and Polish national culture after 1863. As noted in chapter 1, St. Petersburg had responded to the Polish rebellion of 1863 by both undermining the power and influence of Polish elites and attempting to clamp down on Polish nationalism. Polish gentry were sometimes stripped of their estates, and St. Petersburg introduced new policies to obstruct Poles' accumulation of land and wealth. Polish bureaucrats had been replaced with Russians. Polish universities had been shuttered or transformed into thoroughly Russian institutions, the spearhead of a larger effort to Russify education. German multinationalists regarded these policies as a systematic and unconscionable attack on a legitimate European nation. Catholic publications had indeed criticized the Russian persecution of Catholic Poles and Ruthenians since the 1870s, and had long described such policies as "barbarities".[21] In August 1914, Friedrich Meinecke denounced the Russian Tsar as the "Rapist [*Vergewaltiger*] of the Poles, the Finns, and the Baltic Germans!".[22] He argued that Russia's primary offenses were Tsarist policies of cultural destruction motivated by the "storm-winds of Panslavic nationalism".[23] Richard Schmidt similarly described Russia's preference for ethnic homogenization as an "irresponsible" and exploitive imperial strategy. "They [referring to the British and Russian Empires] want to be the privileged master-nations," Schmidt wrote in early 1915, "involved in the arbitrary exploitation of other nations".[24] He went on to decry the "universalist policy of Russia," as a "policy of raw conquest", which sought to supplant nations with a single *Weltstaat* under the scepter of the Tsar.[25]

Rohrbach was an early and consistent critic of Russia's efforts to compromise and roll-back Polish national culture. He called St. Petersburg to account for attempting to extirpate

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[20] Paul Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch: Die baltische Provinzen und ihre deutsche Kultur, mit Beiträgen hervorragender Balten und vielen Bildern* (Dachau: Der gelbe Verlag Walter Blumtritt, 1916), 4.
[21] Rebecca Ayako Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for Inclusion after Unification* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 179–82.
[22] Friedrich Meinecke, "Deutschland und der Weltkrieg," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 29, 1914): 618.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Richard Schmidt, "Die Aufgaben der politischen Wissenschaft im Zeichen des Krieges," *Zeitschrift für Politik* 8 (1916): 3.
[25] Ibid., 7.

Polish culture by ending Polish higher education and forcibly installing Russian professors at Polish universities.[26] Already in 1913, he complained that St. Petersburg had instructed its agricultural banks in Lithuania and the Baltics to withhold credit from local landowners, and to extend financing only to Great-Russian immigrants to the region.[27] This, he believed, represented a clear and reprehensible attack by Russia, both on the basic rights of its subjects and on the continued vitality of Polish culture.

Multinationalists thus portrayed Russification, whether carried out through social pressure, the closing of Polish and German universities, the retraction of local self-governance, or "colonization", as a reprehensible assault against a legitimate European culture. They argued that the Russian Empire had established an irrefutable record of enmity to civilized national cultures prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. Having established this pattern of Russification as inherent to Tsarist rule, Rohrbach and other multinationalists could claim that wartime Russian actions against its national minorities were neither undisciplined atrocities nor exigencies of war, but the fatal acceleration of Russia's preferred methods of imperial management.

WWI did indeed radicalize Russian policies of ethnic management. Within the first two years of the war, Petrograd had settled on a policy, which aimed to purge much of its vast western territory of Jews and ethnic German landowners, dispossess them of their property, deport them Eastward, and redistribute their wealth among Russians and other favored ethnic groups.[28] The outbreak of war had quickly shifted the focus of Petrograd's nationality policy from Polish to German targets.[29] The war led Petrograd to completely abandon efforts to assimilate its German minority, and commit instead to policies of demographic reengineering.[30] This transformation was improvised and haphazard. In the first weeks of the war Russian units on the Northwestern front independently began to fill chronic supply shortages by illegally confiscating goods from German-speakers and Jews.[31] As early as September 1914, local soldiers were known to participate in violent pogroms against Jewish populations in front zones. Looting and violence against other civilian populations also occurred. Local commanders rarely intervened to halt this violence.[32] Instead the Russian Army soon began using is nearly unlimited authority to deport "internal enemies" and even entire communities of "suspect" loyalty without trial in an effort to secure rear staging areas from sabotage or espionage.[33] In the first weeks of the war, local commanders, on their own initiative, began to deport local Jewish and German-speaking Russians near the front.[34] In November, the Suwałki governorate launched a more comprehensive effort to expel all German-speaking Russians from the province.[35] By the end of December 1914, *Stavka*, the Russian army high command, had ordered the deportation of more than 200,000 male German-speaking Russian subjects from the Vistula provinces (Congress Poland) to the interior.[36] By January, *Stavka* strongly recommended that the families of military-age men accompany them eastwards. From December 1914 until February 1915, Petrograd codified this policy, and began expelling all German-speaking landowners from rural areas even remotely near the front-lines.[37] At roughly the same time, *Stavka* issued permission to commanders to expel entire Jewish

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[26] Paul Rohrbach, "Rußlands Macht- worauf ruht sie und was zerbricht sie?," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (June 19, 1915): 816.
[27] Paul Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir* (Stuttgart: Verlag von J. Engelhorns, 1915), 13.
[28] Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.
[29] Though St. Petersburg had directed some Russification policies against German-speaking Russians after 1881, it had so far prioritized its campaign against Polish nationalism. Indeed, German-speaking Russians had incidentally benefitted from many anti-Polish measures, in particular restrictions on Polish purchases of land.
[30] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 7.
[31] Daniel Graf, "The Reign of the Generals: Military Government in Western Russian, 1914-1915" (University of Nebraska, 1972), 53–54.
[32] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 17.
[33] Ibid., 18–20.
[34] Ibid., 96, 129.
[35] Ibid., 129.
[36] Ibid., 130.
[37] Ibid., 97.

communities eastward if even one individual was suspected of espionage or disloyalty.[38] By June, Petrograd had expanded the scope of these deportations, to completely purge the provinces of Volhynia, Podolia, and Bessarabia of German-speaking Russians.[39]

This expanding deportation policy was accompanied by the massive expropriation and redistribution of German and Jewish wealth.[40] Again, *Stavka* and Petrograd were quick to sanction and encourage the expropriation or sequestration of German-speakers' property by local army units in 1914. In January 1915, the governors of the Vistula provinces were ordered to encourage the voluntary liquidation of sequestered German properties, in the hopes that this would render the deportation of German-speakers permanent.[41] In reality, liquidation was rarely voluntary. Some army units simply gave away previously sequestered lands. Others gave German landowners a few days notice to sell their properties or face indefinite sequestration without remuneration.[42] In the Spring of 1915, a series of Imperial decrees formally required the alienation of lands owned by German-speaking subjects in most western provinces.[43] In May 1915, Petrograd adopted policies to actively encourage the transfer of these recently vacated lands to ethnic Russian peasants.[44]

In a matter of months, the Russian Empire had developed and adopted a policy to nationalize rural landownership in western Russia, to deport and permanently dispossess most German-speaking Russians and Russian Jews.[45] 41,570 expropriated properties were ultimately transferred to the Russian Peasant Bank, representing hundreds of thousands of effected German Russians.[46] Even this list of properties was incomplete and it did not include either regions occupied by the Central Powers before expropriation, or the de facto transfer of property through the severance of long-term leases.[47] Conservative estimates suggest more than half a million German speakers were slated for expropriation before the Russian revolution interrupted this policy in early 1917.[48] Victims of confiscation were compensated with illiquid bonds, nominally worth only a fraction of their land's pre-war value.[49]

On the ground, deportations and confiscations were brutal affairs, often accompanied by violence and looting.[50] En route to their destination, deportees could spend weeks in cramped, sealed boxcars, hotbeds of infectious disease.[51] Jewish deportees were often victims of additional violence, looting, and pogroms.[52] Local army units routinely refused to protect Jews and their property, and accounts of pogroms in fact usually mention military instigation. Reports of violence and rape commissioned during deportation were unfortunately common.[53] Those Germans and Jews not sealed into boxcars were driven by foot along roads, enduring exposure to the elements and forced to forage for their own supplies and shelter.[54] Thousands died as a result.[55]

German multinationalists decried this violent purge as a barbaric acceleration of Russia's pre-war Russification policies. One observer blamed Russia's barbaric culture as he recounted how German and Jewish Russians were "mercilessly driven from house and farm, thrown into

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[38] Ibid., 138.
[39] Ibid., 134.
[40] Ibid., 172.
[41] Ibid., 98.
[42] Ibid., 63, 96–98. While confiscation denoted a transfer of ownership, sequestration involved only the removal of property from its owner's control and was, in theory, temporary. In reality, sequestered property was frequently confiscated later.
[43] Ibid., 100.
[44] Ibid., 103.
[45] Ibid., 105.
[46] Ibid., 107.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 108.
[49] Ibid., 106.
[50] Ibid., 149.
[51] Ibid., 155.
[52] Ibid., 137.
[53] Ibid., 146–47.
[54] Graf, "The Reign of the Generals: Military Government in Western Russian, 1914-1915," 128.
[55] Ibid.

the street, or dragged through the empire in closed cattle-wagons".[56] Rohrbach reported that Russian propaganda's stoking of a "barbaric, Asiatic" hatred had inspired "terrifying atrocities against all defenseless Germans".[57] Everywhere, he wrote, Germans were "abused by Russian troops", many driven from their homes as their farms were "burned to the ground".[58] He riled his readers against the Tsar's February 1915 decrees, which had effectively dispossessed German-speakers in the South and West of their property.[59] "Hundreds of thousands of Germans", he reported, "have been shipped to the East, where a large portion of them will probably die, and everywhere in literature, art, and administration one seeks to eradicate the influence of the German".[60] At the time of writing, such policies only targeted Germans and Jews, yet Rohrbach warned that other minorities in the Russian Empire faced a similar threat. "The representatives of the peasantry and the reactionaries allied with them," he wrote, "now threateningly demand in the Duma the expropriation of all 'foreign-owned' [Non-Russian] lands within the borders of the Russian Empire".[61] Indeed, right wing Duma representatives and extreme nationalist organizations in the Russian Empire provided easy targets to German multinationalists, as many vocally called on Petrograd to take action against Poles, in addition to Germans and Jews.[62]

Rohrbach felt his suspicions confirmed by Russia's "Great Retreat" in the summer of 1915. The same Gorlice-Tarnów offensive that delivered Congress Poland to the Central Powers produced a spasm of chaos and violence in the Russian army. As the German offensive began in April, Stavka had issued orders to deprive advancing Germans of strategic materiel. Based on faulty intelligence that Germany suffered from an acute grain shortage, General Nikolai Ianushkevich, the Russian Chief of Staff, ordered several commanders along the Northwestern front to destroy local grain reserves during retreat.[63] He eventually expanded this order to include the destruction of ports, strategic railways, and cattle in the path of the German advance.[64] In early May, the swelling rout near Gorlice and Tarnów paralyzed the Russian Southwest Command.[65] As local officers looked for any means to staunch the inexorable German advance, many grasped at the mythology of Russia's scorched-earth retreat in 1812 from Napoleon's advance.[66] Of course, railways and other advances in military logistics had rendered such tactics far less effective at depriving the enemy of supplies. Moreover, because modern armies advanced and retreated across exponentially longer fronts than Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, a scorched-earth policy would entail the depopulation and spoliation of swathes of territory orders of magnitude larger than those of 1812. Nonetheless, desperate Russian commanders seized upon this scheme and, given Ianushkevich's prior sanction of selective destruction, believed they had Stavka's blessing to initiate scorched-earth policies of their own.[67]

In the early summer of 1915, Russian units in Congress Poland began to torch fields, detonate bridges, wreck industrial machinery, and forcibly evacuate entire civilian populations in an effort to deprive advancing Germans of anything useful.[68] As Russian units retreated from northern Galicia and across southeastern Congress Poland, front commanders oversaw the systematic destruction of surrendered lands, the burning of crops, the razing of local villages, and the deportation of Polish residents to the Russian interior.[69] Refugees later recounted being driven

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[56] Edgard Worms, "Was uns der Krieg mit Rußland predigt," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (January 8, 1916): 57.
[57] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 75.
[58] Ibid., 65–68.
[59] Ibid., 13, 65.
[60] Ibid., 39.
[61] Ibid., 13.
[62] Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 23.
[63] Graf, "The Reign of the Generals: Military Government in Western Russian, 1914-1915," 136.
[64] Ibid., 137.
[65] Ibid., 139–40.
[66] Ibid., 139.
[67] Ibid., 139–40.
[68] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17–20.
[69] Graf, "The Reign of the Generals: Military Government in Western Russian, 1914-1915," 141.

from their villages by Cossack whips.[70] Wholesale depopulation spiked in June and July. In mid-August, southwestern front commanders were still petitioning to deport civilians from a belt of territory stretching 100 versts (roughly 66 miles) behind their front.[71] Across Congress Poland, in the Płock governorate, a similar process unfolded during the Russian route, with retreating units torching villages and dragooning Polish civilians eastward.[72] In one region, 22,000 out 25,000 residents were deported.[73] Similar wholesale removals of civilian populations occurred throughout Congress Poland all along the Russian axis of retreat.[74]

Records are spotty, but potentially millions were directly affected, and certainly scores died of exposure, starvation, and disease during this improvised, and militarily unnecessary trek. Firsthand accounts of the deportations frequently mention crude roadside graves left by the eastward flow of deportees.[75] Indeed, Russia's "Great Retreat" was so thorough and disruptive in its destruction, that some historians have posited that the empty wastelands left in its wake accidently confirmed stereotypes of Slavic primitivity and mismanagement for arriving German soldiers.[76] Of course, to ascribe such an effect to German political culture on the whole assumes that German observers were ignorant of the actual perpetrators of this destruction.

In reality, multinationalists were keenly aware of the Russian Army's scorched-earth tactics, and painted the violence of the "Great Retreat" as the apotheosis of *Russifizierungsbarbarei*. Though undertaken on local initiative for strictly military objectives, Rohrbach saw the deportations and arsons as a deliberate acceleration of Russia's homogenization policies. As the violence unfolded, Rohrbach easily conflated the "Great Retreat" with Petrograd's more deliberate and encompassing German and Jewish purges. He seized on the event as gruesome proof of Russian disdain for any "ethnically foreign" citizens.[77] Rohrbach later claimed that, during these deportations, "an inconceivably large number of persons perished from hunger, and later cold and misery".[78] He repeatedly linked such "frightening, inhuman brutality, and bestial cynicism" to a longer pattern of Russian hostility to foreign cultures stretching back to "Ivan the terrible".[79]

Rohrbach understood that a scorched-earth policy represented strategic "madness" and would certainly not slow the German advance in an era of railway and automotive logistics.[80] However, for Rohrbach, the military irrationality of this exercise was not indicative of Russian commanders' panic, but rather proof that their military claims merely veiled Petrograd's real desire to "annihilate" [*vernichten*] its subject "foreign nationalities" and finally resolve the threat of nationalist mobilization along its Western frontier.[81] Depriving German armies of strategic materiel, he wrote, was only an excuse to purge this "occidental-European cultural territory" of those foreign elements which might challenge Pan-Slavic hegemony, and settle the land with more reliable Russian peasants.[82] He argued that Russia had prioritized deporting much of the Polish population in western Russia, and considered it suspicious that expulsions had conveniently ceased as German troops crossed into the Minsk governorate.[83] Russian troops, he inferred, had ceased to deport civilians as soon as they reached indisputably "Russian soil", and had thereafter encouraged the population to "remain on the land".[84] Rohrbach therefore accused

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[70] Ibid., 142.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 143.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 144.
[75] Ibid., 153.
[76] Liulevicius, "Der Osten als apokalyptischer Raum," 56.
[77] Rohrbach, "Rußlands Macht- worauf ruht sie und was zerbricht sie?," 816.
[78] Paul Rohrbach, "Die russischen Fremdvölker und wir," *Deutsche Politik* 2 (June 22, 1917): 795.
[79] Paul Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," *Deutsche Politik* 1, no. 16 (April 14, 1916): 711.
[80] Ibid., 712.
[81] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 40–41.
[82] Paul Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?* (Weimar: Gustave Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1917), 76.
[83] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 711–13; Paul Rohrbach, "Russisches," 1915, 37, R1501/119780, BArch.
[84] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 713.

Petrograd of using the using the war as an opportunity to ethnically cleanse its restive western frontier.

> We stand here before a brutality without comparison in world history. 12 million[*] of its [Russia's] own subjects [*Staatsangehörigen*], whose sons, brothers, fathers fight in the ranks of the Russian army, they will be relinquished to a miserable death, uprooted and deported merely to grant the ruling race [numerical] preponderance, in order to satisfy their lust for expansion.[85]

"The Russian government," he wrote, "in the emptying of this evacuated territory, is led by the aim of creating space for the colonization of Great-Russian peasants in the event of reconquest".[86] "With a single blow," he lamented, "the western belt of minorities [*Fremdstämmigengürtel*][*] would be annihilated, and room for the settlement of Great-Russian peasants won, the core-Russian border pushed hard onto the German frontier".[87]

As the war continued, Rohrbach published long and sympathetic portrayals of expellees. Given his heritage, it would have been understandable for Rohrbach to focus on the plight of German Russians. Instead he attempted to conflate the suffering of Germans, Poles, and Jews.

> In the same way were all other non-Russian nationalities persecuted: the time of Russification, as it reigned before 1905, has returned with doubled terror, for at present one [the Tsarist government] is not content with Police regulations, with the closure of all non-russian schools, all newspapers, and the deportation of individual personalities, but rather one simply eradicates the unwanted population. Jews and, more recently, also Poles have been deported by the hundred-thousand from their homelands and die by the ten-thousand because the government provides in no way for deportees. In their retreat, the Russian troops take the population of the entire land, and leave the country as a desert".[88]

Elsewhere he worried that current deportations might only be a "dress rehearsal" for the expulsion of all Jews from the Russian Empire.[89] He wrote in alarm that in many general expulsions, women, children, and the elderly, had suffered "bestial brutality", been ripped from their homes and transported to Siberia without food, warm clothing, or lodging, and with only a tenuous grasp of the Russian language.[90] "Hundreds of thousands have perished, frozen, wasted away, starved, especially the old and weak, the women and children".[91] "Yes," he wrote, "they have died in the thousands, the hundred-thousands, Millions!".[92] This, he wrote, was a "mass-murder" [*Massenmord*] of "unprecedented size", compounded by the Russian government's obstruction of charitable aid attempts.[93] For Paul Rohrbach, Russia's barbarity manifested in a

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[*] Rohrbach estimated the total number of victims of Petrograd's wartime Russification policies at 12 million. He included in this number populations displaced by the "Great Retreat". This estimate almost certainly overstates the actual number of deported and evacuated persons. Reliable figures of total deportees and victims of violence are difficult to reconstruct, though hundreds of thousands of civilians likely died as a result of deportations, pogroms, and the scorched-earth policy of 1915. Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, "The Quest for Order and the Pursuit of Terror: National Socialist Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as Multiethnic Empires," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 203–4.

[85] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 716.

[86] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 76.

[*] *Fremdstämmigengürtel* is difficult to translate. A direct translation would read, "a belt of foreigners". Here, however, Rohrbach is referring to a region populated mainly by non-Russian speakers.

[87] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 716.

[88] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 39–40.

[89] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 712.

[90] Rohrbach, *Woher kam der Krieg? Wohin führt er?*, 75.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 714.

[93] Ibid.

long arc of nationalizing imperialism, stretching back at least to 1863, and culminating in the violent deportations of 1915.

Paul Rohrbach's accounts of both Russia's wartime deportation policy and the "Great Retreat" are unique in their detail and frequency. However, accusations that the Russian Empire was barbarically cleansing its western territories of suspect civilians became a prominent trope among multinationalists during WWI. In September 1915, Hans Delbrück wrote that the Russian army had attempted to restage the events of 1812 during the summer campaign. "Not only did they carry away or destroy masses of supplies, but they have also tried to drive the populations, which they could not allow to remain in place without food, into the interior of the Empire".[94]

That German observers overestimated the planning and intentionality of the Polish deportations during the "Great Retreat", is not relevant for the question at hand. More important is how Rohrbach and other multinationalists instrumentalized this portrait of Russian "barbarism". Rohrbach wove the "Great Retreat", Russia's deliberate wartime deportations, and pre-war Russification policies into a coherent narrative for interpreting the current war. Rohrbach portrayed this not as a great racial war between German and Slav, but as a struggle between systems of ethnic management, between collaboration and repression. The great moral crime of Russia, Rohrbach argued, was it's constant efforts to "… oppress and violate[·] [*vergewaltigen*] all non-Great-Russian elements of the Russian state…".[95]

Multinationalists differed in how they explained the root of this barbarism. Most explanations focused on socio-political pressures in Petrograd. Multinationalists believed that Russia had a centuries-long history of "Moscowization".[96] These policies, they believed, had accelerated in the past century, both because St. Petersburg doubted the political reliability of its national minorities and because the Tsarist government felt compelled to buy the loyalty of the Russian peasantry to forestall political reforms.[97] Especially after the 1905 revolution, multinationalists worried that the Tsarist government had begun using land reform to purchase the political allegiance of the Russian peasantry.[98] Rohrbach argued that these political pressures had accelerated the domestic repression of non-Russian "foreign-peoples in the empire, namely Poles and Germans", as a means of vacating minority-owned lands for redistribution to the Russian peasantry.[99] German observers worried that the Tsarist government had become dependent upon this strategy for political stability, even though they had already, or would soon, exhaust their domestic supply of arable land available for redistribution.[100] Rohrbach, Schmidt, and others believed that Petrograd had therefore turned to a "politics of expansion", hoping to annex European territory during the war to expropriate and then distribute among the land-hungry Russian peasants.[101] "The Russian soldiers, who are yes almost all peasants," Rohrbach argued, supported the war because they "have been promised land in conquered Germany and Austria by their generals and officers".[102]

Of course, one should not whitewash multinationalist rhetoric. Many German accusations of Russian barbarism drew upon a belief that Russians were either culturally or racially inferior. Multinationalists habitually described Russian society itself as "barbaric" or characterized by an "interior lack of culture".[103] Some even depicted Russians as something less than human.

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[94] Hans Delbrück, "Die Kriegsereignisse im September. Die Absetzung des Goßfürsten Nikolai und die Vertagung der Duma. Das Durchhalten bei uns und bei Anderen," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, September 1915, 145.

[·] "vergewaltigen", the verb-form of Meinecke's "Vergewaltiger", can also mean "rape".

[95] Rohrbach, "Die russischen Fremdvölker und wir," 792.

[96] Ibid., 793.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 7, 11.

[99] Ibid., 13; Rohrbach, "Rußlands Macht- worauf ruht sie und was zerbricht sie?," 813.

[100] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 12.

[101] Rohrbach, "Rußlands Macht- worauf ruht sie und was zerbricht sie?," 809–12; Justus Hashagen, "Wurzeln und Triebkräfte des russischen Imperialismus," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (May 6, 1916): 592.See also Justus Hashagen, "über die weltpolitische Bedeutung des deutsch-russischen Krieges," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (March 17, 1916): 540; Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 12–13.

[102] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 13.

[103] Paul Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.* (Düsseldorf,: K.R. Langewiesche, 1912), 7.

Rohrbach claimed that the Russian Empire's "lower level of culture" and harsh living conditions, had inured its people to misery, making them "much more able to bear suffering" or "hunger and cold, bloodloss, chaos, and corruption".[104] Multinationalists also added their fire to the volleys of atrocity accusations, accusing Russian soldiers of plunder, arson, rape, and murder. They portrayed Russian soldiers as "bloodthirsty predators", and further blamed the "boundless" desire of the Russian Empire for expansion and conquest on the pathological "psyche of the Great-Russian nation".[105]

Justus Hashagen considered both antipathy towards non-Russian cultures and the impulse to programmatically efface cultural diversity "deeply rooted within Russian culture". He believed Russification and conquest to be two manifestation of essentially the same Russian impulse. The same chauvinism which stoked Russia's insatiable appetite for conquest, when turned inward constituted a manic desire to expropriate and purge minorities from Russia. Russification, he argued, had worked for decades to achieve fundamentally the same "conquests" for the Russian nation at home, which they now sought abroad via warfare. "Already inside Russia," he wrote, "a process of expansion of the greatest extent has occurred, in which the great-Russian core eats through the non-Russian shell of its foreign peoples".[106] Having "already trampled so many under their feet within their own state", Hashagen sneered that Petrograd now sought more lands to russify.[107] He thus understood violent conquest as the continuation of Russification by other means, both manifestations of Russia's essentially barbaric antipathy to other nations.

Paul Rohrbach presented a similarly venomous portrait of the Russian Empire's supposed hostility to established European cultures. Rohrbach considered Russia unique in its combined lack of cultural productivity, and simultaneous grave threat to the more valuable and productive nations of Eastern Europe.[108] "As a substitute" for cultural innovation, Russian nationalism advanced "the idea of conquest, of violent expansion, of the subjugation of foreign peoples under the Russian yoke".[109] This Russian idea, he continued, "is not cultural, but power-political, brutal, and strives for the destruction [*Zerstörung*] of superior cultures. Cultural devastation [*Verwüstung*] of the border territories, of those already occupied as well as those yet to be conquered…" awaited those in the path of Russia.[110] This, Rohrbach argued, was the "terrifying barbarism" [*fürchterliche Barbarei*] of the Russian Empire.[111]

Rohrbach also habitually suggested that the conditions of war had turned Russians into "savages", or that conflict had revealed the underlying "Asiatic instincts of Russiandom".[112] Indeed, Rohrbach understood this martial impulse and "naked despotism" as a quasi-genetic flaw, inherited from the Mongolian occupiers of Russia centuries before.[113] Other multinationalist authors attempted to draw the occidental-Russian boundary according to more explicitly cultural parameters. German writers frequently blamed Russian religiosity for the Russian Empire's supposed predilection towards conquest. Russian Orthodoxy's theocratic union of religious authority with the political autocracy of the Tsar deeply troubled German multinationalists. Russian Orthodoxy, observers like Justus Hashagen claimed, pushed an agenda of religious conversion, and in pursuit of this objective gave a theological imprimatur to Russian military adventurism as a new crusade to redeem and convert a materially decadent Occident.[114] Axel Schmidt likewise argued that Russian culture had essentially severed itself from Europe by falling under the influence of a particularly state-oriented brand of "Byzantine Christianity", a

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[104] Paul Rohrbach, "Waffen und Opfer," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 11, 1916): 291.
[105] Worms, "Was uns der Krieg mit Rußland predigt," 57–58.
[106] Hashagen, "über die weltpolitische Bedeutung des deutsch-russischen Krieges," 540.
[107] Ibid., 540–42.
[108] Paul Rohrbach, "England und Rußland, unsere Gegner," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (January 1, 1916): 11.
[109] Rohrbach, *Rußland und wir*, 19.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Paul Rohrbach, "Deutscher Krieg und deutscher Frieden," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (August 21, 1915): 1090.
[113] Paul Rohrbach, "Rußlands Recht- Rußlands Unrecht," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (November 27, 1915): 1580.
[114] Hashagen, "Wurzeln und Triebkräfte des russischen Imperialismus," 589.

development which had saturated Russia with autocratic tendencies.[115] As the war progressed, Schmidt's rhetoric hardened. In 1915 he attributed Russian expansionism to a toxic mixture of "Byzantine spiritual inflexibility, Mongolian expansionist tendencies, and a Russian herd-instinct".[116]

Yet even culturally and racially-inflected criticisms of Russian culture tended to focus on crimes of national homogenization. Each of Hashagen's criticisms of Russian culture referred not only to the potential violence of Russian expansionism, but also Petrograd's desire to forcibly convert and incorporate other cultures into the Great Russian nation. Hashagen thus drew parallels between Russian Orthodoxy's militant evangelization with Pan-Slavism's exaggerated sense of its own moral superiority, and the Russian government's modern efforts to assimilate or supplant minorities throughout the empire.[117] For Hashagen, Russian barbarism was defined by an interrelated complex of military expansionism and efforts to expunge cultural alternatives. Axel Schmidt likewise concluded by emphasizing Russia's threat to the multinational diversity of Europe. Pan-Slavism, imperial Russification policies, attempts by Russian nationalists to (falsely) frame the current war as a struggle between Germans and Slavs constituted, for Schmidt, the most dangerous aspects of the Russian Empire.[118]

Even those multinationalist critics who inveighed against Russian culture concluded that Germany's mission in the war was to preserve European national and cultural diversity from Tsarist threat. Rohrbach's belief that Russian tradition was plagued by an ""anti-cultural destructive fury" [*kulturfeindliche Zerstörgungswut*], nonetheless focused his criticism on the Russian Empire's intolerance for national minorities. This "Mongolian-hatred", he continued, reemerged throughout history, manifesting itself in attacks on "… Finns, the Germans, the Poles, and everything that seeks to be different from Muscovy [*Moskowitertum*]".[119] Russia, multinationalists believed, was barbaric because it destroyed creative national cultures and built nothing in their place. As an editorial in *Deutsche Politik* read, the Russian state habitually, "…exploits newly conquered nations, without bringing culture to them," while the Russian peasantry "exhausts the soil, without ever really bringing it into cultivation. Both [the state and nation] therefore always need new objects to plunder".[120]

Taming Barbarism: German federation as the Mirror-Image of Russian Barbarism

Russian "barbarians", therefore, were not colonial objects, but a quasi-colonial threat to Europe. The multinationalist rhetoric of Russian "barbarism", served two concrete political ends. First, their understanding of the Russian Empire as essentially hostile to its national minorities reinforced their faith that Polish nationalists would collaborate with the German Empire to combat their common enemy to the east. Just as multinationalists recounted Russian history as a chronicle of perennial threat to European nations, they also reframed German-Polish relations into a long narrative of common Central European defense of the Occident from Muscovian barbarism. In the current war, German multinationalists positioned the German Empire as a benevolent protector and the sponsor of worthy Polish nationhood. One observer declared that Germany's "great historical mission" would be to assume the mantle of "defender of all of Europe against the advance of the Russians".[121] F. Helmolt emphasized the lighter hand of German occupation when compared with Russia's administration of its Western Empire.

> We have taken possession in the East of Poland, Lithuania, and almost all of

[115] Axel Schmidt, "Russen und Deutsche," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 19, 1914): 717.
[116] Axel Schmidt, "Russischer Volksimperialismus," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (October 2, 1915): 1297–98.
[117] Hashagen, "Wurzeln und Triebkräfte des russischen Imperialismus," 590.
[118] Schmidt, "Russen und Deutsche," 719.
[119] Rohrbach, "Rußlands Recht- Rußlands Unrecht," 1581–83.
[120] "Der nächste Krieg," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 25, 1916): 410.
[121] W-ar, "Das 'Erbe Rußlands', die Verantwortung Westeuropas, die weltgeschichtliche Aufgabe Deutschlands," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (August 4, 1916): 1398.

> Courland, but we have established there no German reign of terror [*Schreckenherrschaft*] in the place of the Russian, but rather [we have] done everything, in order to allow these territories to forget the terrors of war.[122]

Multinationalists therefore used the rhetoric of Russian "barbarism" to bulwark their claim that German influence would be less onerous than Petrograd's governance and that Poles would therefore accept German leadership as a preferable alternative.

This points to the second major function of multinationalist depictions of Russian "barbarism". Namely, German observers deployed such language in a larger effort to successfully frame WWI as a struggle between the homogenization of Russian imperialism and German-led multinational imperialism.[123] Hans Delbrück warned that Russian victory and domination would produce an unprecedented "impoverishment of human culture, which relies upon the diversity of nations". Delbrück understood national diversity as a form of cultural wealth necessary for the occident's continued progress, and insisted that only Germany could "stem" the vandalism of "Muscovy".[124] Germany was to therefore "simultaneously defend all other nationalities" from such oppression.[125] Richard Schmidt argued in early 1915 that the German Empire must confront the aggression and cultural repression of Russian imperialism and instead preserve the "plurality" of "national and territorial states" in Europe.[126] Catholic publications contended that Germany must defend ethnically tolerant "state-thinking" from the violent nationalism of Russia.[127] In 1916, Ernst Jäckh explicitly contrasted the homogenizing impulse of Russian imperialism, which demanded obedience to "One God, One Tsar, One Empire" and "represses the nations in its way", with a German organized Central European federation, which must uphold the autonomy of its members as "self-determining, equally entitled [*gleichberechtigt*] subjects".[128] One author offered Europe a similarly stark choice between a Russian and a German Imperium.[129] Certainly Eastern European nations could circle "like moths around a flame", moving closer to Russia's version of universal empire, and burn up in its "Caesaropapism", its "Oriental despotism and mysticism". Alternatively, he urged the German Empire to offer these nations, "Security for their own national existence".[130] He further invoked the examples of the Roman and Frankish imperial tradition.[131] Rome and its Frankish imitator, he argued, had governed as a truly universal empire in language, law, literature, art, and morality, forming a great "dome, under whose protection the nations [*Völker*] of the entire Mediterranean dominion and almost all of Europe lived".[132] He urged the German Empire to follow this example.

Naumann enthusiastically endorsed this framework for understanding the Great War. He insisted that his readers eschew arrogant nationalist portrayals of the war as a great conflict between Germans and Slavs, or as a war to spread the German "idea" [*Gedanken*] in Europe.[133] Instead he wrote Germany's war as a great multinational crusade.

> We fight as Germans, but we fight together with millions of non-Germans, who are ready to go to their deaths alongside us in battle, so long as they are respected by us and may believe, that our victory will simultaneously be their victory.[134]

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[122] Hans F. Helmolt, "Die Gefahr der Doktrin," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (April 1, 1916): 444.
[123] Max Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 740.
[124] Hans Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 1915, 130.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Schmidt, "Die Aufgaben der politischen Wissenschaft im Zeichen des Krieges," 3.
[127] Stanlislaus von Dunin-Borkowski, "Weltkrieg und Nationalismus," *Stimmen der Zeit* 90 (1916): 123.
[128] Ernst Jäckh, "'Mitteleuropa' als Organismus," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (June 16, 1916): 1068–70.
[129] Freiherr von Mackay, "Kriegsziele – Kriegserkenntnis II," *Das größere Deutschland*, September 25, 1915, 1267.
[130] Ibid., 1268.
[131] Ibid., 1267.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 10.
[134] Ibid., 11.

A German-led *Mitteleuropa*, he wrote elsewhere, was necessary to preserve the plurality of European nations and ensure that its members would not become "lost nations", like the Finns, Latvians, Estonians, Poles, and Ruthenians had almost become in Russia.[135] Willy Hellpach similarly called upon Germany to defend just such a protective confederation of states against Russian expansion.[136]

Rohrbach repeatedly characterized the history of the European Occident [*Abendland*] as an anti-colonial struggle against Russian barbarism.[137] Russia's apparent drive to homogenize its empire, Rohrbach argued, made reconciliation with Petrograd impossible, and demanded that the German Empire redeem Eastern Europe from Russia's nationalizing and colonizing designs.[138] "Everything which is now under the Russian lash, which thirsts for connection with occidental culture, must be liberated".[139] Those nations who suffered under hated Russian subservience must be allowed to assert their natural membership in "western Europe".[140] Elsewhere he insisted that Germany must lead a "Central European-Oriental Confederation" in defense against Russian expansionism.[141] The German Empire's aims in Congress Poland and the Baltics would not merely fortify German security, but simultaneously liberate oppressed peoples and organize them under German leadership for the "great battle between Central European culture and Muscovian Barbarism".[142] Rohrbach's rhetoric was stark, his russophobia often straying into outright racism. Yet he consistently centered his criticism of the Russian Empire, and indeed used the term "barbarism" to signify, Russia's hostility to the legitimate national cultures of East Central Europe. According to Rohrbach, Eastern European nations like Poland were candidates for German protection precisely *because* they were civilized occidental cultures threatened by Russia. For Rohrbach, Germany's primary mission in Poland was not to act as a *Kulturträger*, but to liberate and collaborate with the Polish nation in defense of their common European culture.

When Rohrbach and other multinationalists accused Russia of "barbarism", they vilified what they considered a Russian propensity to violently repress legitimate national cultures. This denunciation implied, conversely, that the preservation of national diversity, political autonomy, and institutional support for cultural development constituted ethical obligations for projecting hegemony in Eastern Europe. By criticizing the Russian Empire's pursuit of prophylactic security through ethnic cleansing as "barbarous", German multinationalists painted Pan-German proposals to annex and purge Polish territories as an unacceptable imperial practice. That Petrograd considered these foreign populations politically unreliable and potentially "dangerous" did not excuse the violence of deportations and expropriations for German observers. Paul Rohrbach scoffed at this excuse.[143] For Rohrbach and others, aggressive nationalization and ethnic cleansing were the core of Russian "barbarism", the essential crime against which Germany fought. Germany dare not commit the same barbarities. Hans Delbrück summarized this belief that Russia threatened European pluralism when he wrote in 1914, "Russia sees it as its mission to rule Europe and Asia – thus we see it as the mission of Germany, to preserve Europe and Asia from the domination of Muscovy".[144]

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[135] Friedrich Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," *Die Hilfe* 21 (April 8, 1915): 464.
[136] Willy Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (January 29, 1916): 130.
[137] Paul Rohrbach, "Kriegspolitische Ausrichtung," *Deutsche Politik*, April 7, 1916, 666.
[138] In contrast, Rohrbach believed that Germany should reconcile with France during peace negotiations and even allow France to retain its vast overseas empire. Paul Rohrbach, "Vom Kriegsziel," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 31 (1914): 932.
[139] Paul Rohrbach, "England's Verblendung," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 5, 1914): 640.
[140] Rohrbach, "Rußlands Macht- worauf ruht sie und was zerbricht sie?," 819.
[141] Rohrbach, "Kriegspolitische Ausrichtung," 665–66. Rohrbach's reference to an "Oriental" component of this confederation referred to the inclusion of the Ottoman Empire.
[142] Rohrbach, *Das Baltenbuch*, 5.
[143] Rohrbach, "Warum man in Rußland ‚1812' spielte," 713–18.
[144] Paul Rohrbach, "Zur russischen Kriegsgefahr," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (June 13, 1914): 284. Hans Delbrück wrote this before the outbreak of WWI, and therefore already saw Russia as an enemy of European culture by dint of its Russification policies.

Vindication in the Austro-Hungarian Empire: German Multinationalists and Habsburg Loyalism in WWI.

The notable durability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire fed German multinationalists' confidence in the possibility of establishing effective and permanent structures of German-Polish collaboration to stave off this Russian threat. Austria-Hungary's political integrity in the first weeks of the war dramatically defied prior descriptions of the state as sclerotic and teetering on the brink of ethnic conflict. In the summer of 1914, even leaders in the Imperial and Royal [*kaiserlich und königlich* or k.u.k.] army had worried that nationalism might disrupt Austria-Hungary's mobilization or undermine military cohesion.[145] Their concerns are understandable. The k.u.k. army was a thoroughly multinational institution. For every 1000 soldiers, there were 267 ethnic Germans, 223 Hungarians, 135 Czechs, 85 Poles, 81 Ruthenians, 67 Croats and Serbs, 64 Romanians, 26 Slovenes, and 14 Italians.[146] If one or more of these ethnic groups refused to support the Austro-Hungarian war effort en masse, the k.u.k. army would all but evaporate.

When war did break out, however, Austria-Hungary remained remarkably cohesive. The Austro-Hungarian Empire faced severe military challenges in the autumn of 1914, but these were mainly of a material and organizational nature. In size the k.u.k. army had grown only 12% since 1870, despite a 40% increase in the overall population of the Empire.[147] Military expenses consumed only 21% of the total Austro-Hungarian budget, the smallest military spending of any Great Power relative to total expenditures. Even the Kingdom of Italy dedicated more of its budget to the military. In 1906, Vienna had embarked on a program of rearmament and modernization, but by 1914 Austria-Hungary had not yet had sufficient time to build up trained and experienced manpower, or to stockpile modern equipment.[148] As a result, it could mobilize and equip only 48 infantry divisions in August 1914, compared with Russia's 93 and Serbia's 11.[149] Poor leadership and catastrophic operational decisions magnified Austria-Hungary's already difficult position in 1914. Determined Serbian resistance and logistical failings soon halted Austria-Hungary's August invasion, but not before the adventure inflicted severe casualties on the k.u.k. army. Chief of Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf's planned strike into southern Congress Poland also met bloody failure, and the Russian counter-stroke seized much of eastern and central Galicia.[150]

But ethnic strife did not significantly disrupt Austro-Hungarian mobilization or undermine military cohesion. Aside from scattered anti-war protests in bohemia, mobilization proceeded without disturbance, and almost no nationalist disaffection appeared within the military during the first years of the war. Indeed, the outbreak of war brought effusive expressions of dynastic loyalty, even from Czech and Serbian subjects.[151] State censorship and police practices probably exaggerated the public's actual enthusiasm for the war to a certain degree. Imperial authorities, for instance, sometimes orchestrated local demonstrations of loyalty to Vienna.[152] Regardless of the authenticity of popular enthusiasm for the war, imperial solidarity did not fracture in the early years of the conflict. Serb, Croat, and Slovene soldiers were strongly represented in the Austro-Hungarian armies invading Serbia in 1914. South-Slavic soldiers comprised 40% of some units. Despite sustaining high casualty rates in intensive fighting, such units cohered and fought loyally for Vienna.[153] Both the multiethnic k.u.k. army and the Empire as a whole demonstrated a sustained capacity to endure and recover from major military setbacks. In the first weeks of the war, devastating losses had virtually immobilized the Austro-Hungarian

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[145] Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the First World War: 1914-1918," 75.
[146] Ibid., 74.
[147] Ibid., 73.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 74.
[150] Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora: Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2014), 186–87.
[151] Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the First World War: 1914-1918," 75–78; Peter Haslinger, "Austria-Hungary," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 76–77.
[152] Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity*, 80.
[153] Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora*, 188.

army in the Carpathians.[154] Yet even in the wake of Austria-Hungary's disastrous campaigns there and in Serbia, *Habsburgtreue* solidarity remained apparently robust.[155]

German multinationalists commented frequently on Austria-Hungary's integrity. Naumann reflected on Austria-Hungary's wartime mobilization in the opening pages of *Mitteleuropa*, emphasizing that none of the Slavic territories of the Dual Monarchy had revolted or defected.[156] In late August 1914, Meinecke argued that the Austrian nations had demonstrated a "unanimous will" to defend their state, and that the "uniting powers" of the empire had proven "stronger than the dissolving". "Austria's nations want to remain together!".[157] Austrian intellectuals and publicists actively cultivated this mythology of imperial loyalism as an "Austrian miracle", partly in an effort to infuse the war effort with a greater sense of importance, and partly to reinforce support for the Austrian cause in allied Germany.[158] Austrian writers crafted several distinct missions to justify a reassertion of Austro-Hungarian strength on the continent. For their part Austrian conservative and social democratic intellectuals described the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a necessary shelter to support the development of valuable but weak nations.[159] Multinationalist publications in Germany willingly amplified these voices. *Die Hilfe* gladly reprinted Austrian articles which praised loyal Croatians, Slovenians, and Bosnians for rejecting Belgrade's attempt to "justify imperialism" through the Greater-Serbian idea.[160] Another German author wrote with obvious Schadenfreude in the Autumn of 1914 about the disappointment that the *Entente* must have felt in those first weeks of war. Instead of rapid disintegration, the monarchy had actually been reinvigorated.[161]

> We saw with astonishment how in the varied [*Buntgemischten*] Austria all national oppositions disappeared at once, how in Bohemia Germans and Czechs forgot their bitter disputes… the men hurried pugnaciously to the standards and the population unanimously remembered the cultural blessings, that they had long enough enjoyed under the mild scepter of Franz Josef…[162]

Multinationalists quickly pointed out that the common threat of Russia had re-forged the bonds of imperial solidarity. On the 8 August 1914, Jäckh admired how Russia's external threat had caused nationalist "strife" to "disappear" and instead "created a new Austria" of committed imperial citizens.[163] Hans Delbrück similarly concluded , in *Preußische Jahrbücher*, that Habsburg subjects had indeed rallied to the Habsburg crown when faced with an existential threat. Threatened by Petrograd, "Even Czechs and Germans fraternize together as Austrians"[164] Though nationalist politics had produced friction in pre-war Austro-Hungarian politics, by pointing to the wave of Habsburgtreue that swelled in the summer of 1914, multinationalists could argue that such disturbances had been facile, not damning.[165] Naumann insisted that Austro-Hungarian subjects had always really nurtured a deep loyalty to the Dual Monarchy, one which now emerged to defend the threatened state.[166]

Multinationalists' appreciation for Austro-Hungarian solidarity survived beyond the celebratory and enthusiastic atmosphere of the early war. Despite the disastrous military

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[154] Ibid., 186.
[155] Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the First World War: 1914-1918," 77.
[156] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 24.
[157] Meinecke, "Deutschland und der Weltkrieg," 620–21. See Also Friedrich Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," *Die Hilfe*, October 15, 1914, 684.
[158] Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity*, 79–81.
[159] Ibid., 87–89.
[160] Axel Schmidt, "Russland und die Polenfrage," *Die Hilfe*, September 14, 1916, 601.
[161] Geißler, "Wie der Krieg uns zusammenschmiedete," 643.
[162] Ibid., 643–44.
[163] Ernst Jäckh, "Der europäische Krieg," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 8, 1914): 501.
[164] Hans Delbrück, "Die Ursachen des Krieges. Die Chancen. Das Ziel," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 23, 1914, 39–40.
[165] "Der Weltkrieg," *Historisch-Politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland* 154 (1914): 304.
[166] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 96.

campaigns of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914 and 1915, German multinationalists focused on the ethnic cohesion of the Empire. This, they concluded, remained sound. Even after severe military setbacks, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had managed to mobilize an additional 5 million men for military service by the end of 1916, suggesting that the monarchy could still draw on reserves of popular legitimacy.[167] If its military leadership and chronic equipment shortages rendered the k.u.k. army less effective, Austrian troops still fought valiantly at the front and impressed German observers with their dedication. In May 1915, Willy Hellpach thus wrote that, "It brings us joy, when we read of the bravery of its [Austria-Hungary's] Magyar, Polish, Bohemian, and Croatian troops".[168] The battlefield loyalty of Austria-Hungary's ethnic minorities made a durable impression on multinationalist observers, persisting well into the war. Rather than undercutting German faith in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the monarchy's failed campaigns in 1914 seemed to have bulwarked their confidence in Vienna, demonstrating a depth of popular commitment to the Empire. The Danubian monarchy had defied expectations that it would immediately topple under the pressures of war. Through at least 1916, German multinationalists remained convinced of the ethnic solidity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[169]

Multinationalists frequently pointed to Austria-Hungary's successful wartime mobilization to advance their own imperial agenda for Germany. Authors like Ernst Jäckh simply cited Austria-Hungary as proof of the plausibility of harmonious multinational governance.[170] German observers noted that the Danubian monarchy demonstrated that ethnic diversity did not necessarily produce political disloyalty and fragmentation, and that multinational empires need not founder under the weight of their own plurality.[171] Axel Schmidt thus marveled at how "all of the Slavic tribes [of the Austro-Hungarian Empire] had risen against the Russian challenge".[172] Noting that "The plurality of tribes and languages" was the "essential fact" [*Urfaktum*] of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hellpach forcefully argued that the monarchy's performance in wartime had definitively proved the "possibility of blessing the richest diversity of national cultures [*reichste Völkerkultur*] with the strongest state-prestige".[173]

Naumann likewise cited Austro-Hungarian success to dispel concerns about forging a German-led multinational confederation. In the opening pages of *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann sympathized with the reluctance of some Germans to commit to multinational imperialism, given the common belief that Austria-Hungary's dissolution was historically inevitable.[174] However, he spent the subsequent pages expounding upon the remarkable integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the first months of WWI. Naumann singled out Autro-Hungarian reports of the "impeccable achievements" of their Polish-speaking soldiers as "good omens of a better future [Central European] community".[175]

Indeed, a number of multinationalist authors contended that Austria-Hungary's multiethnic composition, and in particular Vienna's commitment to multinational ethnic management, actually bulwarked the empire's security. In the eyes of German multinationalists, Vienna had successfully positioned itself as a defender of smaller national cultures, and thereby earned the loyalty of communities who would otherwise certainly face absorption into less tolerant imperial orders.[176] For multinationalists observers, pluralism and imperial strength were therefore compatible, even mutually reinforcing. In May 1915 the editorial staff of *Das Größere Deutschland* reflected on the "Historical Mission of Austria-Hungary". Vienna's destiny, *Das Großere Deutschland* argued, was "to be the refuge and shield" for all of the "small nations and

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[167] Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the First World War: 1914-1918," 78.
[168] Willy Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 8, 1915): 617.
[169] Friedrich Naumann, "Tschechen und Polen," *Die Hilfe* 31 (August 5, 1915): 481; Ernst Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (July 1, 1916): 1146.
[170] Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," 1146.
[171] Georg Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1917), 86.
[172] Schmidt, "Russen und Deutsche," 719.
[173] Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," 133.
[174] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 23–24.
[175] Ibid., 24.
[176] Friedrich Meinecke, "Nationalismus und nationale Idee (1914)," in *Politische Schriften und Reden*, vol. II, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Darmstadt: Siegfried Toeche-Mittler Verlag, 1958), 94.

pieces of nations among the united nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy".[177] Its objective, therefore, was to defend particularism and the plurality of human existence against the threat of predatory nationalist powers. The editors of *Das Großere Deutschland* argued that this defense of particularism was itself what legitimated the monarchy in the eyes of its national constituencies. Insofar as these nationalities understood the Monarchy as defending their cultural particularism and autonomy, they had a stake in the continued viability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This, the editorial staff argued, was the fundamental source of the *Reichstreue* which had so impressed its contributors during the first year of the war. By extension, the future of the Austro-Hungarian Empire lay not in centralization, but in bulwarking this national autonomy.

Richard Schaukal agreed. Writing in December 1915, he emphasized Austria-Hungary's deeply rooted sense of legitimacy, its many nations united by their common "destiny".[178] Austria, he argued, represented and defended the interests of both small tribes and stately nations to the rest of the world.[179] Schaukal contended that Vienna had cemented this relationship by extending "inner equality" among its subjects and conscientiously respecting the dignity of its constituent nations. Austrian imperial identity, Schaukal concluded, thereby superseded the power of nationality.[180]

A Savior of the State: German Multinationalists and the Celebration of the Austro-Hungarian Ideal.

For German multinationalists, the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not merely represent proof of concept for multinational imperialism. Rather, the Danubian Monarchy represented a positive example towards which the German Empire should aspire, a model for Germany's domestic governance and future role in Europe. Meinecke cited Austria-Hungary to prove that multinational confederations, rather than homogenous nation-states, would organize Europe in the future.[181] Austria-Hungary, he believed, had proven that imperial loyalty and tolerance could overcome national chauvinism.[182] Naumann not only argued that Prussia should abandon its failed *Ostmarkenpolitik*, he further contended that Berlin should learn from Vienna's successful management of its own nationalities.[183] Jastrow similarly argued that the German Empire must learn what it could from Austria-Hungary as it extended its influence into Eastern Europe. In late November 1915, he drafted a long memorandum to the German government.

> …we have, to this point, only lived in the narrow frame of a national state, and have only had to deal with questions of nationality within this constriction [*Beengung*], while Austria has lived in the wide sphere of the multinational for two generations and has become familiar with the problems, that will presumably step before the eyes of the entire world in the course of the near future. The objectives, which will emerge in the course of the next generation in the swarm of ethnicities (*Völkergewimmel*) in the East, we would be completely immature to meet without Austria. What one has hitherto seen as the national incapacity of the Austro-Germans, is to be re-conceptualized, as the capacity to discover and appreciate coming to terms with many nationalities.[184]

Jastrow specified that Germany must especially attend to Austria's example when it came to their position on "non-German nationalities, which still suffer" when subjected to German habits

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[177] Paul Rohrbach, ed., "Die geschichtliche Sendung Osterreich-Ungarns," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 1, 1915): 597.
[178] Axel Schmidt, "Die russische Orientierung der Polen," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (December 25, 1915): 1727.
[179] Richard Schaukal, "Der Oesterreicher," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (December 25, 1915): 1729.
[180] Ibid., 1730.
[181] Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 682.
[182] Ibid., 682–83; Meinecke, "Nationalismus und nationale Idee (1914)," 83; Friedrich Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," *Neue Rundschau*, June 27, 1916, 558.
[183] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 74.
[184] Ignaz Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," November 19, 1915, 118, N30/34, BArch.

of government. He concluded that the future of Europe would be one of multinational states rather than nation-states, and encouraged Germany to learn what it could from the Habsburg strategies of ethnic management as it built its own imperial order in the East.[185]

Even as they cited Austro-Hungarian integrity to demonstrate the remarkable cohesion of a multinational state, German authors used Austria-Hungary to reinforce a narrative of European redemption through multi-ethnic tolerance and collaboration. This was most obvious in their portrayals of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Paul Rohrbach painted Franz Ferdinand as a salvific Martyr for multinational coexistence, a man whose life had been dedicated to reforming the Habsburg state's structures, and whose death had literally revitalized the "Austro-Hungarian *Staatsgedanke*".[186] Rohrbach described Franz Ferdinand in Christological terms, a *Soter Polou*, crucified in Sarajevo, his death would redeem a fallen world. Implicitly, this cast the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a potential paradise, with multinational harmony as its cosmic order. Conversely the national chauvinism of "fanatical Greater-Serbians", became the original sin that had soiled this Eden and introduced chaos.[187] The assassination of Franz Ferdinand, and the effusive expressions of *Habsburgtreue* that followed represented a salvific moment, rescuing the nations of the empire from the damnation of national partition and interminable rivalry. Franz Ferdinand's canonization as a political martyr became a prominent leitmotif among German multinationalists. Delbrück believed the Archduke's blood would "stoke deeds that far supersede what the living could have accomplished" much as the "blood of the Martyrs once formed the mortar for the stones of the church".[188] Willy Hellpach similarly cast Franz Ferdinand in a messianic role, the bringer of a multinational gospel whose assassination absolved the dual monarchy of its national tensions, inspiring its subjects from all cultures to rise in indignation and defend the empire from the evil of nationalism.[189] Austria, Hellpach concluded, had risen in the war "like a phoenix", finally dispelling any doubts about the longevity or integrity of the multinational empire.[190]

Austria-Hungary offered almost mythical inspiration for some German observers, pressing them to rethink the nature and eschatology of German nationhood. Austria-Hungary represented, for Willy Hellpach, a mirror into what German nationhood once was, and what it could be again. Reflecting on the monarchy's experience of multinational solidarity during wartime, Hellpach wrote that, "The German essence seeks in this new Austria its second face".[191] He wrote of a German national character fractured and inflected with ideas of Prussian order and rationality. The Austrian monarchy, he suggested, expressed a deeper impulse towards "cosmopolitanism" within the German national character, an inherent preference for diversity and plurality in the world. This "German peculiarity", sometimes seen as the nation's "old inherited weakness", in fact constituted the "intrinsic value of Germans for the world", the nation's historical contribution to humankind.[192] The German Empire, Hellpach lamented, had lost some of this original character and needed to once more express its "ancient, cosmopolitan face" through a healthy commitment to diversity.[193] Austria-Hungary, he felt, not only proved that this could be done without endangering security, but also offered an inspiring example for the German Empire to emulate. In concrete terms, postwar Germany could not attempt to "Germanize" the world.[194] Rather, he insisted that the German Empire adopt its own multinational mission as the leader of a *mitteleuropäisch* block of European states and nations.[195]

A year later, Hellpach couched his conclusions in stronger terms. He explicitly enjoined

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[185] Ibid., 120.
[186] Paul Rohrbach, "Hie Schuld- Hie Schickung!," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 8, 1914): 506.
[187] Paul Rohrbach, "Vierteljahrsübersicht über die auswärtige Politik," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (July 4, 1914): 361.
[188] Hans Delbrück, "Die Kriegsgefahr," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, July 1914, 374.
[189] Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," 129.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," 617.
[192] Ibid., 623.
[193] Ibid., 620–23.
[194] Ibid., 623.
[195] Ibid., 624.

Germany to look to the "timeless validity of the Austrian example" for its own future expansion, to use the war as an opportunity to build something like an "Austria on the grandest scale".[196]Accordingly, the expression of German imperial power in Europe would not entail the imposition of German culture. Rather, like Austria, Hellpach felt that the German Empire should direct a collaborative system of multinational security, one which fostered loyalty through the explicit defense of local cultures and autonomy.

> The manner in which Germany should prepare to erect a "world empire", [should be] Austrian in the end. We do not want now to Germanize the chain of nations from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean, as England has made a third of the globe English. On the contrary, we want to preserve national character in its abundance at every stage of this path. Yet all of these nations, as always to be organized as states, shall from now on not [be] a state in the ordinary sense, but rather become a sort of state-acting single entity: bound through more than paper agreements, secure through their uniform cooperation against hostile and rival powers. We are forging this work in the joyous belief that this will be, overall, the new form of World-Empire formation in the future: that in which the similarly oriented [*gleichgerichteten*] state formations unite to form a common state-consciousness, without needing to sacrifice the essence of their national traditions.[197]

Hellpach admired the Austro-Hungarian Empire because he believed it demonstrated the compatibility, indeed the complementarity of common security and respect for cultural plurality. Hellpach saw the Austrian model as the only means for "small" nations to defend themselves from homogenization and absorption into other global empires in the future. In his estimation, small nations could either choose between becoming "rapidly British", or seeking shelter in a multinational formation, wherein they could continue to develop their unique culture.[198] He therefore also painted multinational leadership as a moral imperative: by sheltering demographically smaller nations, the German Empire was to perform a great cultural service to humanity, allowing these diverse nations to generate new artistic and literary achievements. As the German Empire took on this new mantle, Austria would be its "example, of how it is possible for variously disposed national traditions to reconcile with a common comprehension of the state [*Staatseinsicht*]".[199]

This vision of German nationhood as deeply cosmopolitan resonated widely among German multinationalists. Hans Delbrück similarly wrote that the relentless march of political Russification or English imperial norms threatened "human culture" with "impoverishment, as they aimed to eclipse "the plurality of Nations" in the world.[200] Much like Hellpach, Delbrück therefore denounced Prussian Germanization policies as contrary to the essential spirit of German *Kultur*.[201] Adolf Grabowsky lamented that Prussia-Germany had developed into such a firmly bound nation-state, and called upon the German Empire to transform itself into a multinational imperial state.[202]

Revising the Austrian Model: German Multinationalist Proposals for Austro-Hungarian Reform

For multinationalists, Austria-Hungary's solidity broadly endorsed the viability of a nationally diverse empire. They did not, however, recommend aping Vienna's particular constitutional structures or strategies of ethnic management. Even Austrophiles like Willy Hellpach harbored grave concerns about the Austro-Hungarian constitutional order, and cautioned Berlin against

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[196] Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," 132–33.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid., 132.
[199] Ibid., 133.
[200] Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," 130.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Adolf Grabowsky, *Die polnische Frage* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1916), 63.

building a facsimile of the Danubian Monarchy in Eastern Europe.[203] The 1867 *Ausgleich* had effectively partitioned the Austrian Empire into the Kingdom of Hungary (*Transleithania*) and those territories still directly controlled by Vienna (*Cisleithania*). The two states remained bound together in personal union under the Habsburg dynasty, which set a common military and foreign policy.[204] Multinationalist criticism focused on two weaknesses of dualism. First, multinationalists took issue with the *Ausgleich*'s de facto enfranchisement of ethnicity. The Transleithanian constitution had cemented the power of Magyars in the Kingdom of Hungary. In the new National Assembly, a narrow franchise skewed the lower House of Representatives in favor of Magyars, while the upper House of Magnates ensured the predominance of the Magyar nobility in government. After 1867, Magyar nationalists, representing only 40% of Transleithania's total population, had adopted intrusive policies to assimilate Slavic and Romanian populations into a larger Hungarian nation.[205] Multinationalists like Naumann naturally denounced Transleithania's Magyarization policies in education.[206] But Naumann also faulted the structure of the *Ausgleich* for encouraging Hungarian elites to pursue Magyarization. The *Ausgleich* had been premised on national, rather than territorial autonomy. That is, Hungarian autonomy had been justified by the idea that the Hungarian nation was entitled to its own political institutions, and had therefore linked ethnic identity with specific political rights. Under this logic, the persistence of large ethnic minorities threatened the further national atomization of Hungarian territory. Magyar elites thus strove to efface national diversity as a threat to the integrity of the state, and their own privileged position within it.[207] Though a staunch supporter of regional autonomy, Naumann remained wary of the principle of national self-determination, seeing in Transleithania its potential to legitimate secessionism and its propensity to encourage state policies of homogenization. Both injured imperial unity.

Secondly, German multinationalists believed that the *Ausgleich* had stripped Vienna of the necessary authority to effectively manage imperial competences and bind the Austro-Hungarian Empire together. Naumann again criticized the 1867 *Ausgleich* for creating two loosely associated governments, rather than erecting a common imperial administration to unite the regions of the Empire.[208] He found the military structure of Austria-Hungary particularly problematic. Although the empire technically retained jurisdiction over military affairs, Vienna had no practical mechanisms to impose recruitment policies or quotas on Transleithania.[209] The *Ausgleich* had specified that the imperial budget for expenditures on the navy, the k.u.k. Army, and foreign policy required decennial renewal, through negotiation between Vienna and Budapest.[210] The requisite bilateral negotiations gave Budapest disproportionate influence over formally imperial matters. Budapest could always leverage budgetary negotiations to manipulate or stonewall military reforms, foreign policy initiatives, or even Cisleithanian domestic policies it found distasteful or injurious to its prerogatives.[211] The awareness that Budapest would not accept any expansion of the empire's Slavic population, as this might result in a move towards trialist reforms that would dilute Budapest's privileged position, had, for instance, severely limited Vienna's foreign policy options in the Balkans.[212] Lacking any common imperial parliament, the *Ausgleich* had similarly made innovating imperial institutions incredibly difficult. This proved a dire weakness when Vienna confronted the novel logistical and financial strains of WWI. With Vienna's limited authority over Hungary, a situation quickly developed in which Cisleithania relied upon imports of Transleithanian foodstuffs, but was not legally entitled

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[203] Hellpach, "A.E.I.O.U.," 133.
[204] John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 167–69.
[205] Laurence Lafore, *The Long Fuse: An Interpretation of the Origins of World War I* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1997), 55–83.
[206] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 88; Delbrück, "Die Kriegsgefahr," 375.
[207] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 89.
[208] Ibid., 244.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Lafore, *The Long Fuse*, 55–83.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., 83–111.

to their delivery. Hungarian food exports to Cisleithania declined during the war, a source of mounting animosity within the empire.[213]

Willy Hellpach actually went further than Naumann in his criticism of Austria-Hungary. Although Hellpach repeatedly stressed the importance of multinational autonomy in matters of education and cultural policy, he expressed deep concerns that Austria-Hungary suffered from the lack of a common military and administrative language.[214] Though ready to concede linguistic pluralism in local administration, Hellpach considered a single language of communication in imperial administration and the army essential for the maintenance of state efficiency and power.[215] Consequently, he argued that Berlin should diverge from the Austrian example in this respect, and that any future German-led multinational confederation would need to adopt High-German as a "Language of understanding" [*Verständigungssprache*] or a "international language of translation" [*zwischennationale Dolmetschsprache*] for the military and confederal administration. German, Hellpach suggested, would need to become the second language of all Central-Europeans under German leadership.[216]

However, these represented diagnoses of Austro-Hungarian Empire maladies, not death certificates. Indeed, the Empire's survival in the face of apparent structural dysfunction only reinforced their argument that Austria-Hungary proved the fundamental soundness of multinationalism as an organizing principle. If various national units could cohere under such a faulty constitution, multinationalism could certainly function with proper organization.

German multinationalists had clear ideas of what proper constitutional organization would look like. The flurry of proposals to reform the Austro-Hungarian constitution produced by German observers in the first years of the war reflected what structures and political systems their authors considered indispensible to multinational survival. Friedrich Meinecke offered one of the first wartime endorsements of Austro-Hungarian reform. Greater centralization of power in Vienna, he argued, would only undermine the integrity of the state. Meinecke stressed that, counter-intuitively, Vienna needed to grant more, not less, autonomy to its national units. To satisfy their legitimate demands for national self-rule, Austria-Hungary needed to fundamentally restructure itself into a "federation" of autonomous national-states, with Vienna governing only specific competencies.[217] Meinecke hoped that Vienna's role as the orchestrator of common Austro-Hungarian security in the present war would strengthen the links of *Staatsgedanke* which bound the various nationalities to the empire.[218] As far back as 1900, Naumann had similarly concluded that the ideal solution for Austro-Hungarian reform was probably the one already proposed by the Austrian Social Democrats at their recent meeting in Brünn. Namely, he argued that Austria should restructure itself as a "multinational federal state" [*Nationalitätenbundesstaat*] comprised of "autonomous territories of national self-administration", drawn to map onto the regional distribution of national and linguistic communities to the greatest extent possible. This new federal empire would not impose any official language, but would require the "de facto recognition of German as the language of intercourse".[219] Naumann recommended that Vienna delegate all linguistic and cultural matters to the governments of these autonomous territories. Simultaneously he encouraged Vienna to guarantee the protection of any national minorities within the borders of these new autonomous territories. By 1900, therefore, Naumann had already endorsed federalism as the proper constitutional structure for reconciling nationalist aspirations with Imperial integrity.

Looming war lent new urgency to the question of Austro-Hungarian reform, and in July of 1914, Naumann's protégé Rohrbach reexamined the issue at length. The Serbian assassins, he

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[213] Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in WWI*, 31–87.
[214] Willy Hellpach, "Politische Gedanken über die deutsche Sprache," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (February 18, 1916): 372–73.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 373.
[217] Meinecke, "Deutschland und der Weltkrieg," 620–21.
[218] Friedrich Meinecke, "Präliminarien der Kriegsziele," *Das größere Deutschland* 2, no. 31 (July 31, 1915): 1008; Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," 684.
[219] Friedrich Naumann, *Deutschland und Oesterreich* (Berlin: Verlag der "Hilfe," 1900), 17.

contended, had moved against Franz Ferdinand precisely because he had intended to restructure Austria-Hungary as a trialist state. This, he argued, would have stabilized the Monarchy by satisfying the demands for national autonomy of at least some of its constituent parts. This would have taken the wind from the sails of the greater Serbian movement.[220] In Rohrbach's estimation, the crown-prince's efforts to harmonize national demands with Imperial integrity had not been the last desperate gamble of a disintegrating state. Rather, their near success had confronted the Serbian nationalist movement with an existential threat. In July of 1914, Rohrbach didn't see an Empire unraveling at the seams. He saw a state that had been challenged, but was fundamentally viable, perhaps in need of some tinkering.

And tinker he did. Days later Rohrbach published his own reform proposal for the Austro-Hungarian constitution. On 11 July 1914, Rohrbach argued that the Austro-Hungarian Empire should devolve autonomy to its nationalities on the model of German-style federalism.[221] Such federal states would be responsible for their own education systems, police, infrastructure, cultural policy, and possibly even military. Under such a model, Vienna would have coordinated foreign policy, military policy, and common economic policy. Rohrbach contended that such an organization would stabilize internal tension between Vienna and its peripheral nationalities by guaranteeing the continued existence and autonomy of each nation, whilst simultaneously empowering Vienna to safeguard the new federation's common security and prosperity. Both Meinecke and Rohrbach concluded that the continued viability of the Austro-Hungarian state required a tremendous devolution of authority to the monarchy's national communities. They had little fear that such empowerment would encourage these "national" federal states to secede. Indeed, they felt that this would increase their attachment to Vienna by giving them a stake in the success of the Habsburg project.

Rohrbach's 11 July article further suggested that federalization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would facilitate its expansion in the Balkans.[222] A federal Austria-Hungary could subsume Serbia as a federal state, perhaps even while preserving a Serbian monarchy. Indeed, there was no reason that a Serbian federal kingdom couldn't be consolidated with the other South-Slav regions already under the Habsburg scepter.[223] Rohrbach clearly felt he had cut the Gordian knot, reconciling the apparently incompatible demands of Habsburg integrity with nationalist dreams of a greater-Serbia. Once the Habsburg monarchy organized on the paired principles of regional autonomy and multinational unity, Rohrbach felt that there would be little difficulty in expanding into ethnically diverse space. The peoples of the Balkans, Rohrbach concluded, would accept Habsburg sovereignty, so long as this was accompanied by political guarantees of their own continued national culture. Likewise, Vienna need not fear long-term instability or the permanent threat of nationalist secession movements in newly incorporated regions.

Conclusion

German multinationalists therefore used depictions of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires not to advance a project of German racial or colonial supremacy, but rather to establish an ethical framework for imperial organization premised on the defense of cultural diversity. Use of terms like "barbarism" and "*Unkultur*" should not be automatically interpreted as yet more evidence of mounting racial nationalism in Germany. Multinationalists described the Russian Empire as "barbaric" or as an enemy of culture in order to vituperate their policies of national homogenization. In doing so, they in fact articulated an anti-colonial ethical framework for imperialism, one which opposed nationalization and ethnic cleansing. Identifying Petrograd's efforts to Russify, dispossess, or even expel its ethnic and cultural minorities with Russian "barbarism" discredited nationalizing strategies of ethnic management in general, including those proposed by the Pan-German League. Multinationalists' accusations of barbarism did not express a Germanic-Slavic racial binary, but rather invariably reasserted the civilized and

[220] Rohrbach, "Vierteljahrsübersicht über die auswärtige Politik," 360–61.
[221] Paul Rohrbach, "Die serbische Untat und die politische Lage," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (July 11, 1914): 401.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., 402–5.

occidental status of Poles. If terms like "barbarism" and "Asiatic" expressed a certain orientalism among German multinationalists, they firmly believed the "orient" began to the east of Poland.

Conversely, German multinationalists celebrated Austria-Hungary's incubation and defense of human cultural diversity as the apogee of civilized governance. The German Empire had, of course, ostensibly gone to war to defend the integrity of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. German multinationalists vocally condemned the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand as a "deed of fanatical Greater-Serbianism", a crime of national chauvinism against a legitimate and benevolent multinational state.[224] Just as Germany fought to liberate the oppressed Poles from the threat of Russification, they simultaneously defended the Austro-Hungarian Empire from Pan-Slavic designs. Thus Hellpach rejected those who would claim a "Germanic world mission" against Slavs, as much of the Slavic world in fact fought alongside the German Empire. "We now stand in the field," he wrote, "not just for ourselves, but for the idea of a real, peculiar, Austria-Hungary, that is composed of Slavs, Germans and Magyars…".[225] Hellpach thus urged his reader to think of this war not as a conflict for German aggrandizement, but rather as a war to defend a legitimate and stable multinational state from the predations of nationalism. German multinationalists framed WWI from the outset as a heroic struggle by the Central Powers to preserve the nations of Central Europe from either chaotic atomization or violent Russification. Calumny against Tsarist forms of ethnic management converged with Germany's original *casus belli* to chastise Serbian radicalism, forging a grand multinationalist narrative of the war, one which competed with racial frames of Teuton vs. Slav.

Indeed, influential German thinkers explicitly rejected the independent and sovereign nation-state as the ideal norm of modern political organization, and instead confidently promoted a concept multinational or state-oriented empire. Friedrich Naumann offered one of the most cogent and concise distillations of this position. Nation-states, he argued, were a false ideal of the 19th century, a pied piper which had led states to crimes of cultural violence. Great Britain, France, Russia, and even Germany had perpetrated acts of inner colonization in attempts to homogenize foreign elements, with no success.[226] The German Empire, he argued, must broaden its gaze from "German thinking" to "Central European thinking". In short, it must adopt a "supra-national" [*übernational*] mission.[227] Similarly, Friedrich Meinecke famously endorsed statist imperialism over nationally oriented expansion.[228] In 1916, the left liberal Heinz Potthoff optimistically asserted that "The [present] war means the end of racial thinking and the ideology of nationality as a state building force. Also among us in Germany must the national [*völkische*] experience an attenuation. The stately is victorious over the national".[229] Adolf Grabowsky similarly predicted that a cosmopolitan supranational state, which contained various nationalities, would organize Europe after the war.[230]

Multinationalists' interpretations of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires also directly reinforced their faith in the plausibility of long-term German-Polish collaboration. In Russia, German intellectuals and publicists saw a credible threat to Polish culture that would convince Poles to accept German leadership as necessary for the continued development of the Polish nation. Conversely, they understood the remarkable durability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as evidence that multiethnic composition could be compatible with imperial stability. Sympathetic German observers cited Austro-Hungarian solidarity to argue that convincing national minorities of the benefits of imperial membership could be more productive than attempting to suppress ethnic diversity. Multinationalists explicitly pointed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a model for emulation. They believed that Austria-Hungary's political turmoil stemmed primarily from its dysfunctional constitutional system, which had incidentally

[224] Rohrbach, "Vierteljahrsübersicht über die auswärtige Politik," 361.
[225] Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," 616.
[226] Friedrich Naumann, "Zwischen national und international," *Die Hilfe* 21, no. 19 (1915): 473.
[227] Ibid., 474.
[228] Albert Hofacker, "Der übernationale Staat und der Nationalstaat," *Das größere Deutschland* 3, no. 23 September 1916 (September 23, 1916): 1239.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

catalyzed fractious nationalist competition for political resources. If often unimpressed by the reality of Austro-Hungarian governance, they still celebrated Austro-Hungarian multinationalism as an ideal to which Europe and Germany should aspire.

German observers considered multinationalism sustainable so long as the demands of security coordination and economic efficiency (imperial unity) were properly balanced with a robust system of autonomy that reassured national elites that they could govern their own affairs and without threat of homogenization. It was not by accident that multinationalist reform proposals for Austria-Hungary invariably prescribed the federalization of the empire. German multinationalists believed that the constitutional model of German federalism had already struck this proper balance between particularism and imperial efficiency. German multinationalists invested great faith in German territorial federalism as a means of domestic stabilization and, as a model of imperial expansion.

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Federalism as a German Model of Imperial Expansion

If Austria-Hungary proved to some Germans that long-term multinational governance could succeed in an era of modern mass politics, German-style federalism represented to them a functional model of political organization. Multinational union with Poland promised a tectonic advance in the security of Germany's eastern frontier. As with all seismic shifts, it risked shaking the foundations of the German order in Eastern Europe into dust. Unlike the direct control over territory promised by hardline nationalists, multinational imperialism relied on the willingness of Poles to accept the bargain of autonomy for loyalty. With Warsaw in control of its own military's recruitment and training, some observers worried that the proposed multinational union might not furnish effective and reliable units for the German order of battle. Multinationalist had to make the case, that the Kingdom of Poland would not renege on their military obligations in the event of war, or that the Polish army, now equipped and trained to Prussian military standards, would not revolt or conspire with foreign powers to seize those territories of eastern Prussia it considered rightfully theirs. The example of German federalism convinced multinationalists that these fears were misplaced.

The federalist constitution of the German Empire has long been the subject of scholarly attention. However, historians have generally focused their investigations on how the constitution functioned and its impact on the development of German politics.[1] Federalism has occasionally been celebrated as a useful safeguard against autocratic centralization. In contrast, some scholars have criticized federalism for insulating dynastic princes and reactionary elites from liberal political reforms.[2] Other historians have offered a more balanced appraisal of federalism's track-record, describing it as a constitutional device which could be employed for a variety of ends.[3] More recently, historiographical inquiry has shifted to the interplay between regional culture, national identity, and federalism in 19th century Germany. Studies have demonstrated that the persistence of a myriad of regional cultures and particularistic identities were compatible with the emergence and proliferation of national identity. Indeed, regional identities often served as a bridge between local interests and national integration.[4] Other historians have noted that the burgeoning interest in regional culture and *Heimat* identity in 19th century Germany reinforced a shared understanding of diversity as a typical, perhaps even an essential component, of German nationhood.[5] Dieter Langewiesche has even identified a particular federal strand of German nationalism predicated on the celebration and defense of German political and cultural diversity.[6]

Despite sustained historiographical interest, scholars have generally declined to investigate how Germany's unique federalist constitution and political culture influenced German approaches to imperial organization and ethnic management in WWI. Beyond alluding to wish-lists of war aims drawn up by some federal princes during the war, discussion of the

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[1] Hans-Otto Binder, *Reich und Einzelstaaten während der Kanzlerschaft Bismarcks, 1871-1890: eine Untersuchung zum Problem der bundesstaatlichen Organisation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971).

[2] George G. Windell, "The Bismarckian Empire as a Federal State, 1866-1880: A Chronicle of Failure," *Central European History* 2, no. 4 (December 1969).

[3] Gerhard Ritter, "Föderalismus und Parlamentarismus in Deutschland in Geschichte und Gegenwart," Sitzungsberichte, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, October 22, 2004); Thomas Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," in *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1986).

[4] Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[5] Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Maiken Umbach, "History and Federalism in the Age of Nation-State Formation," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, and Future* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[6] Dieter Langewiesche, "Föderative Nationalismus als Erbe der deutschen Reichsnation: über Föderalismus und Zentralismus in der deutschen Nationalgeschichte," in *Föderative Nation: Deutschlandkonzepte von der Reformation bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Georg Schmidt (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2000).

connections between federalism and German imperialism have been scant.[7] Jan Vermeiren's research is a notable exception. Vermeiren acknowledges that some German intellectuals expressed interest in federalist and pluriform political structures as a model for expanding German continental influence during the war. In particular, he recognizes that some Catholic, South German, and left liberal intellectuals attempted to resurrect a mythology of the German nation centered on the old multi-ethnic Holy Roman Empire, and even tried to promote this as a model for European organization.[8] However, Vermeiren interprets these proposals primarily as a reflection of their authors' own domestic anxieties: a bid to build support for the incorporation of Austria-Hungary into a German imperial structure as a means to dilute Prussian hegemony.[9] He therefore closely associates wartime support for federalism with both a quasi-*großdeutsch* affinity for Austria and a desire to fundamentally rebalance the German Empire. Moreover, he argues that this approach was confined to a marginal group of authors, generally romantic medievalists, and far from the mainstream of German nationalism. Because a revived *großdeutsch* sense of identity never eclipsed a commitment to the *kleindeutsch* empire in the popular German imagination, Vermeiren concludes that this discourse was ultimately uninfluential.[10] German approaches to imperial organization are still understood as primarily shaped by German political culture's prevailing obsession with homogenization and Germanization.

Interest in closer institutional relations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire might have ebbed during the war, and Germans generally had little interest in restoring the Holy Roman Empire. Nonetheless, traditions of German Federalism and federal nationalism directly and significantly influenced German approaches to imperial organization and ethnic management during the war, especially in debates over how to establish control over Congress Poland. Both Multinationalists' faith in the federal imperial constitution and their interpretations of German and Central European history convinced them that Poles would accept the fundamental legitimacy of a German-Polish union or multinational confederation. The federalist constitution of the German Empire offered a living example that autonomy and the institutional protections for cultural diversity could be effectively reconciled with the requirements of efficient governance and collective security. Multinationalists cited the experience of Germany's unification and subsequent integration as proof that such guarantees for particularism could bulwark imperial security. They believed that the German federal constitution generated a uniquely ardent and broad degree of loyalty by institutionally preserving the cultural integrity and self-governance of the *Mittelstaaten*. In their minds, the German Empire excited more authentic and durable loyalty than unitary nation-states because it safeguarded the twenty-six polities and innumerable other cultural identities that it contained. In the multinationalist imagination, the German Empire was designed to defend the entirety of Germany from external threats, but drew internal strength by guaranteeing each of its constituent parts against the domineering control of Berlin.

Multinationalists looking to extend strategic influence over Polish space thus turned to German-style territorial federalism as a means to negotiate the claims of Polish nationalism with German security concerns. Their proposals for the multinational integration of Polish space did not rely upon romanticized and anachronistic portraits of the Holy Roman Empire. They didn't need to. Instead their proposals for the formation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland all directly mirrored the German constitutional arrangement of 1871 or were explicitly described as federalist. In many instances, authors cited the apparent success of Germany's 1871 constitution in integrating culturally diverse states into a permanent and effective military coalition as an auspicious precedent for a German-Polish union.

Their mobilization of Germany's history to inform imperial policy in Poland highlights

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[7] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 179–80.
[8] Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72, 134–36.
[9] Ibid., 72, 136, 157.
[10] Ibid., 140.

an essential strand of discourse within Wilhelminian German nationalism. The collective narrative of German history circulating in contemporary nationalist discourse described Germany's past as a series of traumatic invasions and political catastrophes engendered by political disunity and fragmentation. As discussed previously, this national narrative identified German unity as the *sine qua non* of German security and even fostered anxieties among nationalist thinkers that lingering cultural and social heterogeneity endangered the future integrity of the German Empire. The German national narrative, however, was Janus-faced. The apparent success of imperial unification in 1871 reinforced a competing thread within nationalist discourse, which argued that German federalism was both sufficient to guarantee common imperial security and indeed necessary to maintain unity. Federal nationalism explicitly condoned cultural plurality and endorsed the decentralization of most political power to autonomous units. This federal nationalist tradition informed multinationalist visions for the future of Congress Poland, wherein Polish collaboration would be secured just as Bavarian loyalty to the empire had: through robust protections against homogenization or cultural imperialism. Multinationalism proved so influential in part because German thinkers could root it firmly in their own readings of German national history. That is, multinational proposals for managing Polish space reflected a vital strand within German nationalism that favored the protection and promotion of cultural pluralism as explicit political goals.

"German Liberties": The Emergence of German Federalism and Federal Nationalism

German federalism evolved from political compacts among nobles and estates during the Holy Roman Empire. Territorial princes, nobles, and imperial cities had habitually established federations both to preserve their political and social prerogatives against the extension of centralized authority, and to coordinate the collective defense of constituent parties.[11] By the 18th century, effective resistance by these federations had repeatedly blocked Kaisers from consolidating a strong central government with significant fiscal and military resources at its disposal. Indeed, central authority had become so weak, by this point, that the Holy Roman Empire was barely able to contain the ambitions of its more powerful constituent polities. Unchecked by imperial authority, territorial princes in the 18th century had pursued increasingly expansionist agendas within, or even against, the empire. Friedrich II's seizure of Silesia in 1740 and his attempt to annex the electorate of Saxony in 1756 represented only the most dramatic challenges to the imperial order.[12]

Despite the Holy Roman Empire's waning power, its decentralization had inspired a unique *Reichspatriotismus*.[13] Defenders of the empire praised its structure for preserving "German liberties", safeguarding Germans' diverse array of rights, privileges, and self-governance by carefully balancing power between the Kaiser and the imperial estates.[14] They compared this favorably to the French Monarchy's campaign of centralization and fiscal extraction.[15] Although some Enlightenment critics like Samuel von Pufendorf called for imperial centralization, reformers like Justus Möser proposed rationalizing the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire while still preserving its federalist protections of political and cultural diversity.[16]

In the wake of the Holy Roman Empire's collapse in the Napoleonic Wars, educated German elites called for the political consolidation of the Central European states as a means to more effectively defend themselves from foreign aggression.[17] However, for much of the 19th

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[11] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 62.
[12] Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 186–99.
[13] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 67.
[14] Georg Schmidt, "The Old Reich: The State and Nation of the Germans," in *The Holy Roman Empire: 1495-1806*, ed. R.J.W. Evans, Michael Schaich, and Peter Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire: Volume I*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.
[15] Martin Wrede, *Das Reich und Seine Feinde: Politische Feindbilder in der Reichspatriotischen Publizistik zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Siebenjährigem Krieg* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2004), 47.
[16] Umbach, "History and Federalism in the Age of Nation-State Formation," 42–44.
[17] Dieter Langewiesche, "Reich, Nation und Staat in der jüngeren deutschen Geschichte," in *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 199; Rebecca Ayako Bennette, *Fighting for*

century German nationalists generally preferred uniting existing polities into a federal state to establishing a new unitary state.[18] Several groups had particularly strong motives for opposing the creation of a unitary German state. While many Roman Catholics supported political consolidation, they worried that the creation of a unitary German state would necessarily exclude Austria. This would render Catholics a minority and simultaneously strip them of the protection of the Catholic Habsburg monarchy. German Catholics feared that any unitary German government would either introduce policies favoring protestant confessions or enable liberals to implement anti-clerical policies on a national scale.[19] Before unification in 1871, most liberals were also skeptical of a unitary German state. After 1815, German liberals had achieved remarkable reforms in their own states, promulgating constitutions, rationalizing administrations, and reinforcing the principle of the rule of law.[20] In the 1860s liberal representatives had gained control of the *Landtage* in both Baden and Württemberg, and the governments of both states had offered to share political power with liberal representatives.[21] Most liberals hoped to preserve their local states as guarantors of their political freedoms and parliamentary influence. To create a unitary German State risked incorporation into Prussia and the acceptance of its more authoritarian constitution.[22] Many held to the model of a federal state as a form of unification that would consolidate Germany's economy, military, and foreign policy, while preserving the freedoms already obtained in liberal-controlled states.[23]

The dynasties and governments of the individual German states naturally resisted unitarism. By the 1860s, the states controlled military and police resources that could impede centralization and had also successfully cultivated a strong sense of regional identity and political legitimacy among their subjects.[24] Hoping to demonstrate their own utility as engines of growth, state governments had sponsored economic reforms, railway construction, and state industry.[25] Governments also reinforced regional identity through public education, universities, libraries, and museums.[26] Semi-official and state-run newspapers praised the reform efforts of the local governments, and invariably promoted the continued existence of the individual states within Germany. State-sponsored periodicals often enjoyed broader regional circulation than nationalist papers favoring *kleindeutsch* unification.[27] Many 19th century Central Europeans thought of themselves primarily as Bavarians, Hannoverians, Prussians, Württembergers, or Saxons, and only occasionally as Germans.[28] When they expressed their membership in the German nation, they frequently asserted a distinctly federalist national identity. The 1862 national Marksmen's Festival in Frankfurt am Main, for instance, symbolically portrayed the German Nation as a composite of its numerous state and regional identities. The national black-red-gold tricolor was accompanied everywhere by the flags and heraldry of the *Einzelstaaten*.[29]

19th century proponents of unification had considered federalism to be either the ideal, or at least inevitable, constitutional structure of a German state. Roman Catholics, liberals, state governments, and their loyal citizens agreed on the necessity of constitutionally protecting regional autonomy and limiting the competence of a central state. They developed a "federal

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the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for Inclusion after Unification (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 15–22.

[18] Otto Dann, "Der deutsche Weg zum Nationalstaat im Lichte des Föderalismus-Problems," in *Zentralismus und Föderalismus im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert: Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich*, ed. Oliver Janz, Pierangelo Schiera, and Hannes Siegrist (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 2000), 58.

[19] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 15–22.

[20] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 74; Green, *Fatherlands*, 38, 58.

[21] Ritter, "Föderalismus und Parlamentarismus," 21.

[22] Green, *Fatherlands*, 17.

[23] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 74–76.

[24] Green, *Fatherlands*, 12, 20.

[25] Ibid., 13–16.

[26] Dann, "Der deutsche Weg zum Nationalstaat," 55.

[27] Green, *Fatherlands*, 149–53.

[28] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 72.

[29] Dieter Langewiesche, "Kulturelle Nationsbildung im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 85.

nationalism" which prioritized the protection of regional and political diversity as essential to German identity.[30] Federal nationalists still strongly favored ending Central Europe's political fragmentation. But federal nationalism offered a means of imagining the German nation, and its constitutional future, as congruent with the conservation of old "German liberties" and the rejection of cultural and political homogenization.[31] In their proposals for unification, federal nationalists favored preserving the autonomy of German states as a safeguard for cultural and political diversity, and simultaneously creating a federal government responsible for common tariff policy, collective security, and foreign policy.[32]

Prominent plans for German unification throughout the 19th century conformed to a federal nationalist model. Early proposals from Prussian reformers Karl Freiherr von Stein and Wilhelm von Humboldt called for the creation of a federal nation-state to preserve "German liberties".[33] In 1848, Frankfurt parliamentarians like Heinrich von Gagern opposed the creation of a unitary government while arguing for a federal state with limited responsibilities.[34] Berlin's subsequent efforts to forge the Erfurt Union similarly envisioned fortifying Prussian leadership in Germany through a *kleindeutsch* federation.[35] Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, *Mittelstaaten* governments persistently argued in favor of federal models of unification.[36] Even after Prussia's decisive victory at Königrätz in 1866, Berlin recognized that Austria's defeated allies could be pressured to turn over their foreign policy and military sovereignty to a Prussian-led federation, but would not tolerate annexation.[37] The resulting North German Confederation therefore exacted the "minimum surrender of state sovereignty" from the German states while still providing for the "adequate military defense" of the whole.[38] Berlin hoped that this federal constitution would assuage South German concerns of Prussian dominance, and eventually entice Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg to incorporate themselves into the Prussian system.[39]

The constitution for the German Empire in 1871 replicated this federal balance. The German Empire was empowered to coordinate a shared military apparatus and conduct a united foreign policy to ensure collective security. The new German Kaiser would assume joint command of the German armies in times of war.[40] However, worried that any attempt at annexation would spark popular revolts and determined resistance by the *Mittelstaaten*, Berlin refrained from claiming more extensive authority.[41] Instead, the new imperial constitution bought the loyalty of the German states by rigorously guaranteeing their broad autonomy and carefully limiting the authority of the central government.[42] The kingdoms, principalities, and free cities of Central Europe were preserved as federal states of the German Empire, each permitted to keep its own constitution, administration, and government.[43] The Kaisers carefully deferred to the real and symbolic power of the states and their sovereigns. During the *Kaiserparaden*, the Empire's annual military maneuvers held outside of Prussia, German emperors reviewed units accompanied by the local monarch, and often dressed in the regimental uniform of a local unit.[44] Federal states like the Kingdom of Württemberg continued to administer their own post and

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[30] Umbach, "History and Federalism in the Age of Nation-State Formation," 44.
[31] Langewiesche, "Kulturelle Nationsbildung," 83–84.
[32] Ibid., 84–85.
[33] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 70.
[34] Dann, "Der deutsche Weg zum Nationalstaat," 65.
[35] Ibid., 58.
[36] Quoted in Green, *Fatherlands*, 200.
[37] Langewiesche, "Föderative Nationalismus," 223.
[38] Windell, "The Bismarckian Empire as a Federal State," 298. There were exceptions. Prussia did annex the Kingdom of Hannover and the smaller states of Nassau, Hesse-Kassel, and Frankfurt following the Austro-Prussian war. Predictably, the decision spawned local political opposition, notably in the form of the German-Hannoverian Party.
[39] Ibid., 293.
[40] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 81.
[41] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 221.
[42] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 80.
[43] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 21.
[44] Green, *Fatherlands*, 319–20.

telegraphy systems, as well as their regional railways.[45] Most importantly, the federal states retained control over their own cultural affairs and education policy. To remove the threat of cultural or confessional proselytism from Berlin, the German Empire simply wasn't granted any competence in these matters.

The constitution included three structures meant to make Berlin dependent upon the federal states, and therefore safeguard their autonomy from Prussian overreach. First, only the states were legally empowered to collect taxes directly. Imperial finances relied on a mixture of tariffs and matricular contributions from the federal states themselves.[46] Secondly, although the *Reichstag* was responsible for passing legislation, the new empire's upper legislative house, the *Bundesrat*, could veto this legislation through a simple majority. Representatives to the *Bundesrat* were appointed, not elected, by the executives of the federal states. State governments could therefore use the *Bundesrat* to scuttle any legislation that offended their interests. To further reassure the federal states of Berlin's commitment to their autonomy, Prussia accepted "gross underrepresentation" in the *Bundesrat* relative to their actual military, economic, and demographic weight in the empire.[47]

Finally, the German Empire had a distributed military structure. Middle size states like Bavaria maintained a completely autonomous army, staffed with its own officers, administered by a Bavarian war ministry, and reporting to the King of Bavaria in Munich. States like Württemberg and Saxony had similar arrangements.[48] The federal armies conformed to a common drill, and used standard equipment. Officer exchange programs, imperial inspections, and frequent joint maneuvers ensured that the federal contingents performed to uniform standards of quality. However, these armies remained firmly under the command of their federal states, with the German Kaiser only taking command in the event of war. This arrangement served two functions. First, by making the German Empire's security dependent upon the federal states, it gave the constituent parts of the empire leverage in decision-making. Secondly, that the larger federal states retained their own armies established an implied *ultima ratio regum*. The possibility that states like Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony might coordinate armed resistance, was meant to deter Berlin from meddling in the affairs of the federal states.

Until the late 19th century, opposition to federalism was limited mainly to radical democrats who understood decentralization as a shield of aristocratic privilege, and favored unitarism as a revolutionary redistribution of power to the demos.[49] After the formation of the German Empire, however, nationally oriented liberals also began to challenge federal nationalism. 19th century *Borussian* historians like Droysen and Treitschke blamed the Holy Roman Empire's political fragmentation for centuries of fratricidal warfare and foreign intereventions.[50] They juxtaposed this weakness and collapse with the unification of the German Empire in 1871. Worried that cultural, religious, and political particularism divided Germans' loyalties and threatened the return of fratricidal conflict or imperial sabotage, they pleaded for programs of cultural homogenization and political unitarism.

The federal imperial compromise, however, satisfied many, and unification proceeded smoothly in most cases.[51] Both federal nationalism and the related panoply of particularistic identities built around regional cultures, local dynasties, and constitutional states continued to blossom after 1871.[52] Germans from across the political spectrum accepted the legitimacy of the new empire as federal nationalists. They were willing to tolerate Prussian authority because they considered its military leadership indispensible to common security, and they were assured by

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[45] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 21.
[46] Imperial financial reforms in the early twentieth century ultimately abolished this constraint for the sake of efficiency. Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 87.
[47] Windell, "The Bismarckian Empire as a Federal State," 297.
[48] Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 21.
[49] Dann, "Der deutsche Weg zum Nationalstaat," 61.
[50] Peter Wilson, "Still a Monstrosity? Some Reflections on Early Modern German Statehood," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 2 (2006): 568.
[51] Nipperdey, "Der Föderalismus in der deutschen Geschichte," 84.
[52] Green, *Fatherlands*, 11.

the constitution that the new empire could not interfere with their treasured "German liberties".[53] South Germans were particularly inclined to espouse federal nationalism as a guarantee of their states' autonomy against Prussian meddling.[54] State culture remained so different, even after decades of unification, that traveling writers sometimes compared states like Bavaria to a foreign country.[55] Germans therefore carefully defended the autonomy of their federal states. In 1875, the population of Württemberg starkly opposed Berlin's proposal to take over administrative responsibility for the kingdom's railways.[56] Before finally rejecting the measure, debate in the Landtag had departed from questions of technical efficiency and focused instead on concerns that imperial absorption would undermine local autonomy and identity.[57] Roman Catholics were also quick to embrace federal nationalism in the 1870s.[58]After unification indeed transformed German Catholics into an embattled confessional minority, the Center Party staunchly defended the federal constitution and federal nationalism. States' control of cultural policies proved an indispensible check against the anti-clerical and homogenizing programs favored by some protestant nationalists and national liberals.[59] Roman Catholics routinely attempted to reframe diversity as essential, rather than incidental or antithetical, to German nationhood.[60] While German Catholics rushed to pledge their allegiance to the *Kaiserreich* after 1871, they simultaneously argued that German nationhood was inherently diverse, and that all parts of the empire contributed to a greater German whole.[61]

This influential federal strand of nationalism resisted political centralization and cultural homogenization, and positively lauded cultural diversity as a German virtue.[62] This discourse of cultural pluralism had developed long before unification. Luminaries like Schiller and Humboldt had celebrated German decentralization, comparing the *Altreich* to ancient Greece: powerless, but intellectually and artistically creative.[63] Throughout the 19th century, particularist historians and politicians had crafted historical narratives emphasizing the unique contributions of Germany's diverse regions and historic "tribes" [*Stämme*] to the development of the German nation.[64] State governments had happily bolstered the centrality of cultural diversity to German nationhood, and used it to bulwark their legitimacy as cultural patrons. Prior to unification, the *Staats-Anzeiger für Württemberg* noted that "It may well be true that the fragmentation of Germany into a myriad of *Stämme* and states has hitherto prevented her from making her political power felt as it should be; it is at least equally true that precisely because of this Germany has become a country second to none with regard to the dissemination of culture and

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[53] Dieter Langewiesche, "Föderalismus und Zentralismus im deutschen Kaiserreich: Staat, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur – Eine Skizze," in *Zentralismus und Föderalismus in 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert: Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich*, ed. Oliver Janz, Pierangelo Schiera, and Hannes Siegrist (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 2000), 85–89.

[54] Ibid., 84.

[55] Ibid., 87.l

[56] Alon Confino, "Federalism and the Heimat Idea in Imperial Germany," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Maiken Umbach (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 81.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 1–15.

[59] German Catholics still considered this federal protection extremely important during WWI. Catholic observers inveighed against French constitutional unitarism, which had allowed, in his opinion, a cadre of anti-clerical politicians to impose their own ideas on the rest of the country, and to use social and economic means of coercion to support secular schools and anti-clerical republicanism. "Kundgebungen der ausländischen Freimauerei zum Weltkrieg als 'Kulturkrieg,'" *Stimmen der Zeit* 89 (1915): 549. In contrast, wartime Catholic authors described federalism as shielding German Catholicism from the worst of the Kulturkampf. Heinrich Schrörs, *Der Krieg und der Katholizismus* (Kempten: Jos. Kösel'sche Buchhandlung, 1915), 55–56, 71. During the War, Catholics continued to demand that the German federal states control education and retain their autonomy V. Hugger, "Nationale Einheitsschule," *Stimmen der Zeit* 92 (October 1916): 1–3, 16.

[60] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 1–15.

[61] Ibid., 76–95.

[62] Langewiesche, "Föderative Nationalismus," 215.

[63] Hagen Schulze, "Foreword," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Maiken Umbach (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), IX.

[64] Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*, 17; Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 97–104, 146; Green, *Fatherlands*, 298–337.

knowledge".[65] After 1871, the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt vigorously patronized the arts, and successfully built his state into a center of *Jugendstil* design.[66] Federal states strongly supported their own university systems, and successfully competed with Prussian institutions for academic prestige.[67] Federal nationalists and regional particularists continued to assert cultural diversity as a positive virtue central to German identity long after 1871.[68] They insisted that cultural diversity was compatible with German nationalism, and indeed argued that Germany's regional diversity enhanced its cultural and intellectual productivity.[69] In the 1870s, Catholic papers like *Germania* lauded cultural diversity as a German virtue, a resource that invigorated and enriched the German nation. By extension they painted the homogenizing projects of national liberals and other *Kulturkämpfer* as "un-German".[70]

Federal nationalism therefore constituted a widely held counter-narrative to the latent chauvinism of *Borussian* nationalism. Federal nationalist discourse did not reject the fundamental premises of the *Borussian* narrative.[71] Both conceptualizations of nationhood portrayed the German past as an unrelenting series of tribulations and foreign invasions invited by the political fragmentation and fratricidal warfare of the German states. Both argued that imperial unity was essential to redeem the German states from this damnation. In 1870, Catholic publications like *Germania* had celebrated the victories of North German and allied arms against the French state, and had urged German Catholics to accept the new *Kaiserreich*. It had, after all, proven its value in defeating the French Empire.[72] Federal nationalists differed from their *Borussian* counterparts in their preferred degree of unification. They argued that the imperial constitution united the federal states to a sufficient degree to ensure the collective security of the German Empire from foreign threats. Further cultural and political centralization risked stultifying German cultural productivity and might even jeopardize states' commitment to imperial integrity. In the 1870s, for instance, Catholic periodicals wrote of the urgent necessity of German solidarity to protect the empire from European rivals.[73] Yet, they lamented, this vital solidarity had been strained by the *Kulturkampf*. Federal imperial unity, they warned, could only be cultivated through tolerance and mutual respect, not through homogenization.[74]

Multinationalist Views of German Federalism before and during WWI.

Many German multinationalists had subscribed to this vision of federal nationalism long before the outbreak of WWI. Like their contemporaries, multinationalists were keenly aware of their country's past confessional fragmentation, repeated fratricidal conflicts, and present cultural diversity. Naumann wrote that Central Europe had been "shattered in the Thirty Years' War, crumbled in the Seven Years' War, split in the Napoleonic Period, and divided in the civil war of 1866".[75] Naumann shared in the belief that Germany's prior "unbelievable political fragementation" [*unglaublichsten Kleinstaaterei*] caused the military impotence which enabled these repeated foreign invasions and political catastrophes.[76] In Rohrbach's 1912 *Deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*, the wounds of confessional strife and fratricidal warfare appear as barely scabbed over. The deep cuts of the Thirty Years' War, so injurious to German "progress" were still healing under recent bandages.[77] Willy Hellpach similarly described the German people as

[65] Quoted in Green, *Fatherlands*, 200.
[66] Langewiesche, "Föderalismus und Zentralismus," 85.
[67] Ibid., 87.
[68] Confino, "Federalism and the Heimat Idea in Imperial Germany," 74.
[69] Maiken Umbach, "Introduction: German Federalism in Historical Perspective," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8; Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*, 80.
[70] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 76–96.
[71] Alon Confino disagrees with this. He understands *Heimat* nationalism and the German national narrative of Central European history as fundamentally incompatible. Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 98.
[72] Bennette, *Fighting for the Soul of Germany*, 22–42.
[73] Ibid., 157–86.
[74] Ibid., 182.
[75] Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 3.
[76] Ibid., 43–44.
[77] Paul Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt.* (Düsseldorf,: K.R. Langewiesche, 1912), 27–28.

ancient "tribal-bickerers" [*Stammesbrödler*], whose constant strife was the primary reason "for which old Germany perished". "Countrysides, tribes, and cities", Hellpach wrote, "fell away from one another, each of which could at most realize a duodecimo[·] or achieve a caricature of a state, and which relinquished itself to every neighboring foreign influence, French, English, Italian, Slavic, Danish, without resistance".[78] Multinationalists thus shared the same anxieties about the integrity of German nationhood that haunted hardline nationalists.

However, German multinationalists generally supported federalism as a workable negotiation between the competing demands of particularist autonomy and the necessity of common German security. Before the war, multinationalists had considered federal unity to be a sufficient and realistic organization of the German state. Rohrbach noted the emotional intensity of sub-national loyalties nurtured by Germans, describing this as the "natural eccentricity of the [German] small states, and the ancient… special consciousness [*Sonderbewußtstein*] of the German tribes".[79] While concerned about particularism, in 1912, Rohrbach considered this political danger already largely surmounted by federal unification. Although Germans had not overcome their "deep-seated defect", by which he meant their ingrained particularism, Rohrbach contended that the example of the German Empire after 1871 showed that "strong, virile, political organization is possible".[80] Hellpach, writing during the war, echoed this pragmatic appreciation of German federalism. Bowing to Prussian unification in 1871, he remarked, had been a "hard necessity which must be borne" for the common good.[81] Hellpach expressed gratitude to Berlin for forming a Germany beyond a "confederation of states", one which "redeemed" Germans from their historic disunity and weakness by building a "federal state".[82] Yet even in 1915 he stressed that political unification should not reach beyond federal coordination. Hellpach insisted that Germany resist the "concept of 'the Prussian'", i.e. the tendency to repress every "peculiarity of nature and expression", which stood in "sharp conflict" with "old German characteristics".[83] Both before and during WWI, therefore, German multinationalists praised German federalism as necessary to safeguard and harmonize Germany's cultural diversity, and sufficient to defend its common frontiers.

Indeed, multinationalists had so admired German federalism that they had frequently recommended it as a stabilizing political reform among Germany's allies both before and during WWI. Multinationalists appeared to understand the difference between national identity and German particularism as a matter of degree, not quality. Supporters of federalism argued that the multinational Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires could effectively resolve even their most fractious ethnic conflicts through territorial-federal reform. The penchant of German multinationalists for proposing territorial federalism as a reform agenda for Austria-Hungary has already been explored above. Indeed, Publicists like Paul Rohrbach frequently compared the experience of Austro-Hungarian nations with Germany's federal states.[84]

Multinationalist faith in the capacity of federalism to manage ethnic diversity was also apparent in their proposals for reforming the constitutional structure of the Ottoman Empire. Intellectuals like Adolf Grabowsky, Johannes Lepsius, and Paul Rohrbach nervously worried about decaying relations between Istanbul and the empire's community of Armenian Christians concentrated in Eastern Anatolia. With the initiation of the Tanzimat reforms in 1839, Ottoman officials had begun to rationalize the empire's structures of rule: imposing more uniform administrative structures and practices, dismantling autonomous communities and privileges, and

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[·] [*Duodezverwirklichung*] "the realization or achievement of a duodecimo". A duodecimo was a manuscript format in which a span of paper was folded into 12 sheets totally 24 sides. It represented one of the shortest traditional book formats. In German parlance, describing political structures in reference to a duodecimo referred to the small size of these books, and was commonly used in a context critical of Germany's traditional *Kleinstaaterei*.

[78] Willy Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (May 8, 1915): 620.

[79] Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*., 15.

[80] Ibid., 95–96.

[81] Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," 620.

[82] Ibid., 621.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Paul Rohrbach, "Die serbische Untat und die politische Lage," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (July 11, 1914): 402.

replacing rule through dynamic negotiation with clear and permanent structures of authority centered in Istanbul.[85]

Predictably, Istanbul's 19th century centralization project met with resistance, especially among traditionally autonomous Christian communities.[86] This was particularly true in eastern Anatolia, where Armenian enclaves and Kurdish tribes had traditionally enjoyed broad license to govern their own affairs. When Ottoman forces attempted to impose central authority in the early 19th century, they were able to dismantle autonomous principalities, but mountainous terrain and the empire's precarious fiscal situation prevented Istanbul from effectively asserting central authority through occupation.[87] Istanbul had instead resorted to a policy of divide and rule, encouraging Kurdish tribes to fight both each other and Armenian communities.[88] Complicating the issue was Istanbul's increasing distrust of Armenian Christians. Armenian communities had repeatedly voiced grievances against both violent abuses of Ottoman administration and in response to the Tanzimat reforms. Given their location adjacent to the Russian border, Istanbul worried that St. Petersburg might use intervention on behalf of their fellow Christians as a pretext to invade Anatolia or that, in the event of war, Armenian communities would function as a fifth column in support of a Russian advance. After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 heightened these fears, the Ottomans threw their weight exclusively behind Kurdish paramilitaries in the simmering conflicts in Eastern Anatolia. In the early 1890's, Ottoman administrators oversaw the organization of the Hamidye Cavalry. The Ottoman state furnished these contingents of irregular Kurdish militia with modern weapons and allowed them to keep their arms in peacetime, essentially coopting Kurdish tribes into the formal imperial structure as a new tool for pacifying Eastern Anatolia.[89] Istanbul allowed the Hamidye Cavalry to operate in Eastern Anatolia with virtual impunity. The massacre of between 80,000 and 300,000 Armenians in a regional convulsion of violence between 1894 and 1896 was the predictable, likely desired, outcome.[90] In the wake of the massacres, Istanbul refrained from systematically punishing the units responsible.[91]

Tensions between Istanbul and Armenian communities had again spiked following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which became increasingly influential in the following years, committed themselves to finally stabilizing their state through the creation of a homogenous Turkish nation-state in Anatolia.[92] Violence surged again in Eastern Anatolia. In 1909 a pogrom in Adana claimed between 20,000 to 30,000 Armenian lives, with the apparent participation of local CUP officials and armed units.[93] In 1910, a secret assembly of CUP leadership first discussed the prospect of mass deportations of Christians as a method for homogenizing Anatolia.[94] The Ottoman Empire's catastrophic defeats in the 1912-1913 Balkan wars only stoked hostility towards the empire's Christian minorities

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[85] Maurus Reinkowski, "Hapless Imperialists and Resentful Nationalists: Trajectories of Radicalization in the Late Ottoman Empire," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, ed. Gregor Thum and Maurus Reinkowski (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 54.
[86] Ibid., 57–59.
[87] Elke Hartmann, "The Central State in the Borderlands: Ottoman Eastern Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 173–79.
[88] Ibid., 180.
[89] Ibid., 178–80.
[90] Ibid., 180.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Reinkowski, "Hapless Imperialists and Resentful Nationalists," 47; Mustafa Aksakal, "The Ottoman Empire," in *Empires at War, 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20; Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 263–64; Eric Weitz, "Germany and the Ottoman Borderlands: The Entwining of Imperial Aspirations, Revolution, and Ethnic Violence," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 165.
[93] Weitz, "Germany and the Ottoman Borderlands," 159.
[94] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 272.

among both Muslim subjects and officials in Istanbul.[95] Key leaders, among them Enver Pasha, erroneously blamed Ottoman defeat on Christian treachery.[96] Istanbul began openly working to permanently secure borderlands through demographic reengineering. In February 1914, Enver Pasha convened initial meetings to organize the removal of non-Turkish populations from strategic regions in Anatolia.[97] Before the outbreak of war in August, the Ottoman Empire had already expelled roughly 200,000 Orthodox Christians from Thrace and Western Anatolia, again with the aid of irregular paramilitaries.[98]

German imperialists watched the decay in relations between Istanbul and the Armenian community with growing alarm. In the late 19th century, the Ottoman Near East had captured the imagination of the both the German public and government circles in Berlin as a potentially profitable field for the extension of indirect German influence.[99] In 1903 Berlin began to consolidate their economic influence in the region by sponsoring construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railway.[100] In the following years German military advisors oversaw the reorganization of the Ottoman army. German observers now worried that nationalist strife in Eastern Anatolia threatened to dissolve the Ottoman Empire or embroil it in a wider conflict and thereby undo Germany's efforts to project economic and political influence in the near east.[101]

Multinationalists believed Ottoman management of its Armenian subjects had been strategically counter-productive. Adolf Grabowsky argued that Istanbul's manifest hostility to its Armenian minority had only alienated the community and risked pushing the population into Russian arms. Indeed, Grabowsky cautioned that Russia might justify the annexation of eastern Anatolia on the basis of Armenian suffering.[102] This would prelude the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In control of the source waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, the Russian Empire would possess a massive strategic lever throughout the Ottoman Empire's eastern half. A victory in Armenia, he warned, would constitute a major step for Russia in its efforts to seize Istanbul.[103]

The Armenian cause elicited sympathies within multinationalist circles before the outbreak of war. Multinationalists recognized Armenia as a civilized culture and conceded the legitimacy of Armenian claims to cultural particularity. Grabowsky described Armenia as a historically unique nation, with a panoply of contributions to human culture, including its native Armenian Apostolic Church.[104] Rohrbach similarly fed an intense interest in the Armenian question, and attempted to marshal German support for the Armenian community. In 1914 Rohrbach and Johannes Lepsius founded the German-Armenian Society [*Deutsche Armenische Gesellschaft*] to lobby for reform in the Ottoman Empire.[105] As with the Polish question, multinationalists objected to emerging policies of repression and violence against the Armenian

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[95] Reinkowski, "Hapless Imperialists and Resentful Nationalists," 53.
[96] Aksakal, "The Ottoman Empire," 21.
[97] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 272–73.
[98] Aksakal, "The Ottoman Empire," 22..
[99] Weitz, "Germany and the Ottoman Borderlands," 152.
[100] Ibid., 155.
[101] Ibid., 152–53. The possibility of Ottoman collapse produced different responses in the German press. Margaret Anderson has noted that interest in preserving the Ottoman Empire as an ally against Russia and as a future site of German investment deterred German publicists and politicians from indicting or pressuring Constantinople for its Armenian policies. Social Democratic leaders and government authorities alike proved reluctant to defend Armenians. Many German observers instead muddied the waters by portraying the Armenian community as a "cat's paw" of Russian or British imperialism. This response differed substantially from French and British attitudes. Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "'Down in Turkey, Far Away': Human Rights, the Armenian Massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 1 (March 2007): 94, 103, 107.
[102] Adolf Grabowsky, "Die armenische Frage," *Zeitschrift für Politik* 6 (1914): 699–702.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 701.
[105] The Armenian question actually split the multinationalist camp, especially among left liberals. While Paul Rohrbach and Johannes Lepsius energetically supported Armenian Ottomans, Friedrich Naumann and Ernst Jäckh sympathized with the government in Constantinople. Naumann not only defended the Ottoman government, he also viciously stereotyped Armenians as untrustworthy. Jäckh actually supported the further centralization of Ottoman political power in Constantinople. Anderson, "'Down in Turkey, Far Away': Human Rights, the Armenian Massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany."

community on both ethical and strategic grounds. Grabowsky stressed the historic loyalty of Armenians as Ottoman subjects, and argued that many Armenian Christians in fact only spoke Turkish.[106] This loyalty, he argued, made the massacres of Armenians perpetrated by Kurdish militia's in the 1890s, or the slaughter of Armenians at Adana by Young Turk forces in 1909 all the more deplorable.[107] He opposed demographically reengineering the Ottoman Empire's eastern frontier, ridding the area of the Christian minority through compulsory emigration or population exchanges. Though more strategically rational on paper, Grabowsky objected on ethical grounds.[108]

As an alternative, Grabowsky argued that Ottomans should pursue a policy of multinational federalism in Eastern Anatolia. Specifically, he proposed the consolidation of the three *wilajets*, in which the majority of the Armenian population resided, into a single, autonomous, majority Armenian region.[109] The Armenian nation, he noted, had historically proven their ability to govern themselves.[110] The creation of an autonomous Armenian polity under Ottoman sovereignty, Grabowsky argued, would eventually earn Armenian loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, and Istanbul would be able to channel Armenian nationalism against the Russian Empire. In time, Grabowsky argued, the creation of a "consolidated Armenia, which is oriented against the Russians", would ably defend the eastern Ottoman frontier.[111]

Sadly, such optimistic reform proposals were not to be. Within less than a year after the opening shots of the war, Ottoman commanders and administrators opted to finally secure their frontier by violently purging Anatolia of its Armenian population.[112] The resulting genocide, prosecuted over 1915 and 1916, claimed hundreds of thousands of lives through massacre, forced labor, and death marches. When word of the violence reached Germany in 1915, Rohrbach and Lepsius mobilized the German-Armenian Society and pressured Berlin to oppose deportations.[113] Unfortunately, their efforts produced little immediate impact.

Federalist projects for Ottoman-Armenian reform were stillborn, but are nonetheless revealing. Even before the outbreak war, German multinationalists considered federalism a promising template for negotiating the demands of imperial security with particularist nationalist claims. If they understood federalism as a product of German national genius, they did not believe that its application was restricted to German conditions. They saw no qualitative difference between the regional particularism of Germany, and the national diversity of the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian Empires. The difference between Prusso-Bavarian, Austro-Czech, and Turkic-Armenian relations was one of degree, not kind. Indeed, multinationalist language in the war ably demonstrates this conceptual slippage. In 1914, as Naumann described the astounding cultural diversity of *Mitteleuropa*, he simply equated Germany's cornucopia of regional dialects with existence of Danish, French, Italian, Croatian, Czech, Polish, Magyar, and Romanian communities in Central Europe.[114] In each of these states multinationalists believed that federalism offered the optimal strategy for integrating diverse national communities into imperial structures.

Germany's successful mobilization in August 1914, helped to dispel any lingering doubts that the Empire might fracture along state lines, or that cultural heterogeneity would subvert popular commitment to the empire.[115] Throughout the war, the federal empire cohered and mobilized as it was designed to, successfully eliciting compliance and even sacrifices from German subjects. In August 1914 alone, the federal armies mobilized roughly 4 million reservists, and enlisted between 300,000 and 400,000 volunteers throughout 1914, all with

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[106] Grabowsky, "Die armenische Frage," 707–10.
[107] Ibid., 703.
[108] Ibid., 704.
[109] Ibid., 709.
[110] Ibid., 708.
[111] Ibid., 708–9.
[112] Reinkowski, "Hapless Imperialists and Resentful Nationalists," 47.
[113] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 283; Weitz, "Germany and the Ottoman Borderlands," 165.
[114] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 60.
[115] Hugger, "Nationale Einheitsschule," 16.

remarkably few desertions or refusals to serve.[116] In many regions, mobilization proceeded with little nationalist fanfare or enthusiasm, but rather with expressions of loyalty to local dynasties or federal states. In much of Bavaria, locals had still prioritized loyalty to the Wittelsbach monarchy and the Kingdom of Bavaria over an imperial cult in 1914.[117] Observers described mobilized conscripts marching to war as Bavarian soldiers, in defense of their Bavarian fatherland as part of the common federal empire.[118] Regional identity remained influential, but local memories of destruction in during the Napoleonic wars, and historic narratives of past invasions of German Central Europe fostered a shared sense of commitment to defend the empire as a whole.[119] One rural Bavarian explained Germany's need to fight in August 1914 by noting that "the French won't leave us in peace unless we give them a good hiding".[120] As the war continued, the desire to defend their local "fatherlands", like Bavaria, continued to motivate and elicit sacrifices from soldiers.[121] Despite military and government investment in propaganda, purely nationalistic explanations for the war generally declined in importance among German troops at the front.[122] Postal and military police surveillance reports from 1915-1916 indicate that while frontline troops frequently criticized Berlin or the Kaiser, the Bavarian monarchy and Generals remained prestigious and respected.[123] Yet simultaneously, the sheer brutality of the war reinforced the commitment of many soldiers to fight in France or Russia, to ensure that the war's ravages would not visit their own *Heimat*.[124]

From 1914 to 1916, multinationalists admired the wartime performance of the German federal empire. After the outbreak of war, multinationalists argued firmly that, "The federal system had proven itself" in Germany's "hour of danger".[125] In the autumn of 1914, one author wrote in glowing terms of Germany's abilities to unite in crisis, despite its profound heterogeneity.

> Where are the parties with their bickering? Disappeared in the storm of an all-powerful patriotic feeling [Vaterlandsgefühls]. Where remains the struggle of confessions. It fell silent in the same moment, where man stood next to man in the ranks of the army... The consciousness of a frightful danger has brought us all together as never before.[126]

Another, mocked international observers who had doubted German integrity before the war. "There is no excuse, however," he wrote in 1915, "for our opponents succumbing to the illusion, that the South-German states and Saxony would hesitate to fight on the side of Prussia…" to defend the empire.[127] Aloys Meister went further. "The federal idea," he wrote, "has proven itself brilliantly for the present continental objectives of the Empire". It had, he clarified, forged a united and solid state, despite the cultural diversity of its citizenry.[128]

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[116] Oliver Janz, "Nationalismus im Ersten Weltkrieg: Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich," in *Zentralismus und Föderalismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich*, ed. Oliver Janz, Pierangelo Schiera, and Hannes Siegrist (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 2000), 167.
[117] Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 19.
[118] Ibid., 138.
[119] Ibid., 19; Janz, "Nationalismus im Ersten Weltkrieg," 167.
[120] Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*, 19.
[121] Ibid., 86.
[122] Ibid., 137–38.
[123] Ibid., 138.
[124] Ibid., 120–21.
[125] Hugger, "Nationale Einheitsschule," 16.
[126] F.A. Geißler, "Wie der Krieg uns zusammenschmiedete," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 5, 1914): 644.
[127] Franz Kolbe, "Unfähigkeit der deutschen Dipolmatie," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (January 9, 1915): 39.
[128] Aloys Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," *Deutsche Politik* 2, no. 15 (April 13, 1917): 473.

Poland as a new Bavaria: German Federalism as the Template for Multinational Imperialism

Multinationalists had already subscribed to a federal understanding of German nationhood before the war, one which understood cultural diversity and regional autonomy as compatible with, even advantageous to, imperial security. They had also begun to think of federalism as a general constitutional mechanism to mediate particular and imperial claims. Consequently, when war broke out, multinationalists naturally recommended federalism as a tool to stabilize the German Empire's strategic expansion on the continent.[129] Multinationalists freely admitted that German federalism inspired their models of imperial management. Georg Gothein blatantly based his proposed union between the German Empire and a Polish-Lithuanian-Couronian state on the precedent of German federalism.[130] Max Seber, insisted that a Germany's future model of European hegemony must be founded on a "federal system of association" in order to assure affected communities that they would continue to manage their own affairs, have a voice in the imperial system, and preserve their cultural integrity.[131] Only a "federal structure", Seber argued, could guarantee peace among the nations of *Mitteleuropa*, and ensure their reliability as components of a larger imperial system.[132] The Catholic historian Aloys Meister wrote that the war had charged Germany with finding a "organization for a World State," through which the German Empire could exercise leadership and continue to develop its own national culture, while simultaneously mobilizing the collaboration of other European nations.[133]

> One could think to oneself, to seek salvation in the marriage of the federal state [*Bundesstaat*] with the confederation [*Staatenbund*], that around our contemporary federal state, namely the German Empire, could be arranged a confederation, that along with us would form a unified military federation and economic federation, and would possess a common foreign policy and foreign representation.[134]

A federal system, Meister insisted, was necessary to guarantee all nations, including both Germany and Poland, the capacity to organize their own affairs and nurture their own culture.

Naumann conceived of his *Mitteleuropa* project, and by extension his proposed incorporation of an autonomous Polish state, in explicitly federalist terms. Indeed, he bluntly stated that German federalism had inspired his project. In his book *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann applauded what he considered the exceptional success of federalism in the German Empire, and argued that Berlin's present leadership needed to attend to its lessons when considering the extension of German influence or Central European unification.[135] The constitutional arrangement of *Mitteleuropa*, he argued, should mimic the federal structure of the German Empire: the central federation would oversee a military and economic union with a common foreign policy, the member states would control all else.[136] Ernst Jäckh likewise encouraged his readers to think of Germany as a "kind of microcosm for *Mitteleuropa*".[137] The federal German Empire, he believed, had already successfully resolved the same tensions between Berlin and the *Einzelstaaten* that Germany now sought to negotiate in the "macrocosm of *Mitteleuropa*".[138] *Mitteleuropa*, Jäckh argued, would need to achieve the same ends through the same means: "Unity through diversity, diversity in unity".[139]

It was no mistake then, that multinationalist proposals for the constitutional relationship

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[129] Hugger, "Nationale Einheitsschule," 16.
[130] Georg Gothein, *Das selbständige Polen als Nationalitätenstaat* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1917), 25.
[131] Max Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (December 8, 1916): 2157.
[132] Ibid., 2159.
[133] Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," 478.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 49.
[136] Ibid., 249–57.
[137] Ernst Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (July 1, 1916): 1145.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 1148.

between a Polish state and the German Empire resembled the federal relationship between Berlin and states like Bavaria.[140] As in the German Empire, multinationalists considered Berlin's central control of tariffs, a common foreign policy, and wartime military command over the Polish army indispensible to the common security and success of the German-Polish union. Just as federal decentralization had been necessary to secure the active collaboration of the *Mittelstaaten*, multinationalists insisted that the decentralization of virtually all other competences was necessary to assure Poles of their future cultural rights and political self-determination.[141] Cultural policy, most domestic decisions, justice, and peacetime military administration were all to be delegated to the Polish State. Most importantly, multinationalists insisted that Poland would recruit, train, and command its own army. As it had for Munich, such an army would furnish Warsaw with an implied instrument of last resort to defend its autonomy and deter Prussia-Germany from meddling in its affairs. Mutlinationalist resolutions to the Polish question were so imbricated in this tradition of German federalism that some multinationalists, like Hans Delbrück, contemplated the potential incorporation of Poland into the German Empire either as a new federal state or in personal union with the Wettin dynasty.[142]

As German observers agreed that nations existed, that national identity was difficult to change, and that national communities strove to govern their own development, managing imperial space became a question of whether or not diverse national communities could be realistically coordinated for common aims. Multinationalists enthusiastically cited the history of German federalism to answer this question in the affirmative. They argued that multinational federalism was organizationally efficient, and would reinforce, not sabotage, imperial integrity.

Multinationalists defused skepticism that a Polish state could provide quality army units that could be smoothly integrated into a German order of battle by arguing that union with Poland would be based upon Germany's own demonstrably successful military structure. Naumann began contemplating how to create an efficient and responsive military apparatus in 1914. In particular, Naumann worried about how to manage and incorporate military structures based on different methods of recruitment, training, and equipment. He rejected the idea of a loose "coordination" of military organizations through negotiation. This, he feared, would have unpredictable and "unsure" outcomes. For *Mitteleuropa* to posses a strong military, which he considered its primary objective, Naumann argued that it required an "army union" [*Heereseinheit*]. That is, it required an overarching military administration which set common standards for recruitment, equipment, and training for member states, and would be responsible for command of the confederation's united armies during wartime.[143] Here he cited the federal unification of the "German Imperial Army from the earlier individual states" as the model for a successful military organization that united otherwise largely independent states. In his 1915 book *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann again cited the German Empire as his military model for central Europe. The German constitution, he noted, had created a union of Prussian, Württemberg, and Bavarian *armies* and, he argued, this system had acquitted itself well in the present war.[144] Naumann lingered on the example of the Bavarian army as proof that autonomous militaries could be effectively coordinated for imperial security.

> The Bavarian Army forms a self-contained component of the German federal army, with an independent administration under the military sovereignty of the King of Bavaria; In war, however, and with the beginning of mobilization, under the authority of the federal-commander [*Bundesfeldherr*]. Regarding organization, formation, training, taxation, and the regulation of mobilization, there is complete

[140] Even nationalists opponents of autonomous Poland compared the solution to the federal states of Germany. Member of the Prussian House of Lords, "Polen, das Glacis im Osten, Militärgrenze," September 2, 1916, 101, R1501/119795, BArch.
[141] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 231; Max Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 739.
[142] Hans Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 1915, 135.
[143] Friedrich Naumann, "Mitteleuropäische Zukunftsgedanken," *Die Hilfe*, 1914, 445.
[144] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 254–55.

conformity.[145]

Naumann considered this arrangement ideal. The German Empire retained the right and duty to inspect the Bavarian Army, to ensure that it was properly equipped, trained, funded, and that it was prepared to participate in imperial war plans. A union of Central European armies, Naumann insisted, would necessarily require common standards of army size, equipment, and training, and a unified strategic command.[146] If it adopted the German-Bavarian model, he argued, the Central European military union would perform just as well in future conflicts as the German federal armies did in the present war.

German multinationalists used the rhetoric of federal nationalism to denounce nationalizing methods of ethnic management as antithetical to German virtue. Multinationalist authors described the model of federal multinational empire as manifesting an authentic, deeply-rooted, "specifically German state-idea [*Staatsidee*]".[147] Aloys Meister located the "essence" of German nationhood in its "particularism" and the rejection of "unitarism".[148] Ernst Jäckh similarly argued that the essential spirit of Germany was opposed to "standardization, conformity, and mechanization".[149] Seber described the German "national psyche" as suffused with "respect for foreignness".[150] Aside from claiming that homogenizing methods of imperial management were counterproductive, multinationalists marshaled the symbols and rhetoric of federalist nationalism to claim that they contravened Germany's core virtues and honor.

Multinationalists likewise pointed to the historic success of German federalism to answer nationalist concerns that Poland would remain a reluctant, or potentially treacherous, satellite. To begin with, they marshaled the argument that diversity, protected by federal decentralization, had been historically valuable for the German Empire. Ernst Jäckh thus argued that federalism had fostered a diversity of cultural resources that bolstered German creativity. He contrasted this with conditions in France, where, he argued, unitarism imposed unimaginative Parisian governance and norms on an unenthusiastic nation.

> The German structure surpasses the repressive poverty of the unilateral control of the French Paris, not only politically, but also culturally, to achieve a creative richness through diverse plural rights in their own contributions: whether in Munich or in Stuttgart, in Dresden or in Frankfurt, in the borderland or on the waterfront.[151]

Catholic thinkers were especially sympathetic to the argument that Germany reaped practical benefits from its institutionalized diversity.[152] Federal pluralism, one contended, supported the "great diversity of theoretical and practical knowledge", which in turn explained the remarkable success and "power of German industry" evident in the war economy.[153] By extension, multinationalists believed that integrating nations like Poland would accelerate scientific, artistic, and intellectual innovation for the whole imperial system.[·]

Secondly, multinationalists pointed to German federalism to demonstrate that cultural diversity would not undermine a German-Polish union built around the "communal interest" of collective security.[154] They argued that German federalism had laid bare the baselessness of this

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[145] Ibid., 225.
[146] Ibid., 29.
[147] "Review: 'H. Mühlestein, Der Vorrang der deutschen Staatsidee und ihr Sieg in Europa,'" *Deutsche Politik* 1 (March 24, 1916): 624.
[148] Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," 473.
[149] Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," 1146.
[150] Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," 2159.
[151] Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," 1145.
[152] Peter Lippert, "Weltkrieg und religiöses Bekenntnis," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 88 (1915): 7.
[153] Hugger, "Nationale Einheitsschule," 18.
[·] See also Chapter 2.
[154] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 33; Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," 473; Stanlislaus von Dunin-Borkowski, "Weltkrieg und Nationalismus," *Stimmen der Zeit* 90 (1916): 124.

anxiety. Writers like Naumann noted that even through centuries of history and decades of political unification, German cultural diversity had not measurably declined. "If we now gather in our German Reichstag", Naumann quipped, "so we also note that here Prussians, Bavarians, Saxons, Württembergers, Hessians, Hannoverians, and Mecklenburger's sit side-by-side on only a few issues".[155] However, Naumann, Meister, and other multinationalists agreed that in matters of imperial importance, Germans had proved able and willing to properly set aside the "special aims" [*Sonderbestrebungen*] of their federal identities and support the empire's "communal interests".[156] Multinationalists firmly believed that, much like the *Einzelstaaten* of German Central Europe, neither the German Empire, nor an independent Kingdom of Poland, could alone secure their own borders from foreign powers like Russia. Meinecke argued that the common threat of Russia would "force all Central European nationalities" to collaborate with a German-led federation to "mutually guarantee the foundations of their national existence".[157] Just as memories of Napoleonic invasion had bound together the German states into a united empire, so to, multinationalists believed, would the threat of Russian aggression bind Poland in loyalty to its German suzerain.[158] In possession of autonomy, guaranteed by a federalist system, German multinationalists held that Poles could gain very little by betraying Germany, but risked losing everything to Russian predation.

Furthermore, multinationalists drew from the history of German federalism to argue that autonomy would actually reinforce Polish commitment to a German-Polish union. Multinationalists believed that federalism's institutional guarantees for state autonomy had elicited a uniquely ardent commitment to the German Empire from its citizens, because it had linked their state interests to the success of the empire as a whole. The German Empire had not inspired loyalty by replacing vibrant Bavarian or Hessian identity with a wooden German patriotism, but by promising to shield these identities from foreign meddling. In his defense of multinational imperialism, Max Weber argued that Bavaria had readily agreed to unification in 1871 because the federal constitution had signaled that the empire would preserve, rather than threaten, Bavarian autonomy and particularism.[159] The strongest pillar of "imperial thinking" wrote Meister in 1917, was that "Membership in the empire secured the individual federal states in their possession and their rights". This, Meister continued, would likewise motivate loyalty to a German-led confederation.[160] One Catholic observer noted that the "federal organization of Germany" would make German leadership in Central Europe possible, because nations like Poland could be assured that their "ethnological character, and the special aptitudes, and the developmental potential of their tribes" would be "brilliantly accommodated".[161] Rohrbach described the genius of federalism in its ability to garner the security of national unity, whilst also "having similarly secured the existence of every country and nationality, as it had been the case for Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, and the rest of the small federal states in the German Empire".[162] Because a federal system would guarantee autonomy, multinationalists sincerely believed that Poland would willingly "depend on German military power to assert their independence" against Russian threats, just as Bavarians had accepted Prussian leadership in 1871.[163]

Ernst Jäckh offered the most vehement defense of imperial strength through federal protections of diversity. In July 1916, he argued that federalism had been the foundation of German unity. The genius of federalism, he contended, was that it had turned apparent weakness

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[155] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 33.
[156] Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," 473; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 33.
[157] Friedrich Meinecke, "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus," *Die Hilfe*, October 15, 1914, 684; Friedrich Meinecke, "Probleme des Weltkriegs," *Neue Rundschau*, June 27, 1916, 566.
[158] Hellpach, "Deutschlands österreichisches Gesicht," 625; Friedrich Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 895; Friedrich Naumann, "Die Nationalitäten Mitteleuropas," *Die Hilfe*, April 8, 1915, 465–67; Wilhelm von Massow, "Die Polen und der Weltkrieg," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (November 6, 1915): 1490.
[159] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 739–40.
[160] Meister, "Bundestaat, Nationalstaat und überstaatlicher Staatenbund," 473.
[161] von Nostitz-Rieneck, "Mitteleuropa," *Stimmen der Zeit* 92 (1916): 30–31.
[162] Rohrbach, "Die serbische Untat und die politische Lage," 401.
[163] Seber, "Mitteleuropa und der Frieden," 2157.

into strength.

> Germany emerged and grew as an empire of 'federated governments and free cities'. Seen from the outside, this has long been considered a German weakness and it has been held as such so long as the individual organs [of the empire] have not grown together into the unity of the organism. But this earlier weakness has become real strength: The development of the nature and power of the individual states and through this the increase in the essence and impact of unity.[164]

By explicitly protecting the particularistic identities and interests of its constituent parts, Jäckh held that the federal empire had, in fact, inspired more authentic commitment from its citizens than a unitary state ever could. The German Empire didn't merely serve the interests of Berlin or the electoral majority. It protected the interests of local identities as well.[165] The union of Germany and Poland, Jäckh continued, would similarly generate loyalty because of, not despite, its protection of Polish identity.[166]

Multinationalists also cited Germany's past to argue that a common Central European identity would gradually bind German and Polish communities together. Just as the Franco-Prussian war had bound together the various cultures of the German "*Kleinstaaterei*" through a common experience of threat and triumph, Naumann argued that, the current struggle against the Russian Empire would forge a lasting, supranational, Central European identity.[167] The war, he argued, would bind Germans, Poles, Austrians, and other Central Europeans into a "community of battle and death", a community much stronger than facile ethnic or national frictions.[168] While national diversity would remain prevalent, Naumann argued that old jealousies and grievances would gradually fade. Who in Saxony, after all, still begrudged Prussia the territory it had annexed in 1815? Who in Germany, he wondered, still considered Prussia an opponent after 1866.[169] Just as the *Einzelstaaten* of Germany had abandoned their seemingly unbridgeable enmity after 1866, multinationalists argued that Germany and Poland would gradually build a common "spirit of the state".[170] The world war would forge a common history for Germans and Poles. The threat of Russian expansionism would bind their fates.

Finally, multinationalists cited Germany's own history to emphasize the importance of German leadership in a Central European confederation or German-Polish union. Scholars have questioned the authenticity of German "imperialists by federalist means", arguing that they had little interest in actually incorporating other nations as partners in a German imperial structure.[171] Historians have described these projects as "cultural imperialism" or claimed that imperialists justified German leadership over such an enterprise based upon the German nation's own organizational superiority.[172] German imperialists' implied or stated preference for German leadership over any federal imperial structure has understandably convinced many subsequent historians that these projects represented yet another ominous assertion of Germany's national superiority.

However, recognizing the centrality of German constitutional models and historical experiences to multinationalist proposals frames their insistence upon German leadership in a different light. Multinationalists believed that the history of the German Empire and the Holy Roman Empire demonstrated the necessity of a more powerful core state to preside over the

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[164] Jäckh, "Der Sinn für das Organische," 1145.
[165] Ibid., 1148.
[166] Ibid., 1145–48.
[167] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 4.
[168] Ibid., 32.
[169] Ibid., 34.
[170] R. Hildebrandt, "Polen und Deutschland," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 3, no. 22 (May 1, 1916): 108; Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 35.
[171] Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity*, 159–60.
[172] Ibid., 162; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 62–64.

other constituents of a given federation: an imperial center of gravity to arrest centrifugal disintegration. Though multinationalists nurtured a deep admiration for federalism, they were not blind to the political chaos of the early modern Holy Roman Empire. They too looked to the post-Westphalian *Altreich* and concluded that autonomy, though generally desirable, must be limited. In particular, they concluded that members of a federal empire must not be allowed to follow an independent foreign policy, as they would inevitably pursue anti-imperial goals with the help of foreign sponsorship. Warsaw would be denied sovereignty in foreign policy, not because multinationalists considered Poles less politically worthy, but because Germany's own experience with federalism had shown independent foreign policies to be incompatible with imperial security. Similarly, multinationalists concluded from their studies of Central European history that imperial stability relied on the balance of both particularist autonomy and a strong central power to hold the union together. To achieve a stable and "effective military unity", Naumann claimed, required a centralized military administration and a single, more powerful, federal state to lead the union, and prevent disagreements among member states from devolving into civil war.[173] Federal unity, he argued, relied on a careful balance of mutual deterrence. Just as member states were to balance and deter the accumulation of power by the center, so must a leading state have the military and economic weight to police and deter conflict and secessionism within the federation. In Germany, this leading power had been Prussia. In *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann predicted, the German Empire would play this role.[174] Just as federalists did not endorse Berlin's leadership because they considered Prussia more advanced than to Württemberg, Baden, Saxony, or Bavaria, multinationalists' endorsement of German suzerainty over Poland did not indicate a claim of cultural superiority. In both cases, a powerful core state was understood as a practical necessity for imperial integrity.

Conclusion

Interpretations of the Central European past therefore strengthened multinationalist belief that national diversity was compatible with, perhaps even conducive to, imperial security. Multinationalists shared an overarching narrative of Central European history with German nationalists, one which equated imperial unity with German security. However, supporters of multinational ethnic management differed from their nationalist competitors in their belief that protections for cultural autonomy and diversity reinforced imperial integrity, rather than undermining it. Multinationalists further looked to the manifest success of German federalism in negotiating the competing cultural and political claims of the German states as a model for peacefully integrating Congress Poland into a German imperial structure. Just as a federal structure had enabled Bavarians, Saxons, and Württembergers to perceive the German Empire as a non-invasive defender of their own security, so to, they believed, would Poles come to see a Central European Confederation or German-Polish union as a benign shelter in which their nation could continue to develop.

Germans in WWI did not espouse multinational imperialism in spite of their surrounding political culture. Rather multinational imperialism drew upon a deeply rooted and popular tradition of German nationhood as well as distinctly German mechanisms of political negotiation to articulate a pluralist vision for Europe's future. Multinationalism was just as much a product of 19th century German political culture as the violent racial fantasies of the Pan-German League. Moreover, the broad resonance of federal nationalism in German political culture before and during WWI suggests the potential receptivity of the German public to multinationalist proposals. As we shall see in the following chapter, the precedents and experiences of German federalism certainly informed the empire's military and civilian authorities as they established Germany's imperial policy for Congress Poland.

[173] Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, 49.
[174] Ibid., 50.

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The German-Polish Union: German Policy-Makers and Multinational Imperialism, 1914-1916

As German armies swept into Belgium and northern France, and traded blows with the Russian Empire, the civilian and military leadership of the German Empire perceived the same fundamental security paradox described by civilian observers. They too understood the strategic control of the Polish salient as an indispensible priority for reducing the threat of Russian invasion in a future conflict. In an early speech, Bethmann Hollweg announced Berlin's intention to secure Germany's "frontiers against every danger" and close the "invasion-gates of Belgium and Poland".[1] Aware of Prussia's failure to Germanize its eastern provinces, imperial leaders also worried that annexing Polish space would enlarge and provoke a major national minority in the German Empire. They too worried that Polish nationalists might work treasonously against Germany, perhaps even collaborating with Berlin's rivals for the cause of Polish secession.

From the first weeks of the war, therefore, leaders in the imperial government, interested federal states, and military commanders all discussed and debated how to govern the population of Congress Poland while still achieving key German objectives in the region. Debate rapidly consolidated around the two paradigms of nationalizing and multinational ethnic management. The fundamental question remained whether the German Empire could trust Poles to reliably defend and serve German interests or if Polish nationalism would invariably lead Poles to betray Germany for their own ends. From the outbreak of war in 1914, through the spring of 1916, policy-makers in virtually every invested agency of the German government gradually concluded that a multinational imperial solution, specifically the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, represented the most promising avenue for achieving German strategic objectives in the region without sparking sustained Polish resistance. Germany's military and civilian leadership chose to pursue a German-Polish union, because they believed that permanent collaboration with Polish nationalists was both possible and advantageous.

The historiography of German war aims in Poland has long been dominated by discussion of government proposals to annex, Germanize, or even ethnically cleanse a Polish 'border-strip'. Since its articulation by Geiss and Fischer, historians have propounded the argument that Germany's military and civilian leadership systematically, continuously, and overwhelmingly supported annexations and nationalization as the primary means of projecting power into Congress Poland. Geiss portrayed annexations as the focus and *sine-qua-non* of German ambitions in Poland. In his view, the 'border-strip' "dominated" the military and civilian agendas from 1914 through the last weeks of the war in 1918.[2] He further contends that no German statesmen took the idea of a "Polish-friendly solution" seriously because they worried it would entail the recognition of all "justified aspirations" of Polish nationalists, and would require Berlin "to directly or indirectly offer the Polish national movement Posen and West Prussia, with the risk, in a broader view, of also losing East Prussia".[3] Geiss therefore contended that Berlin consistently prioritized carving significant annexations from Congress Poland. Furthermore, Geiss suggested that annexationist plans invariably implied aggressive nationalizing policies of ethnic management, including colonization and ethnic cleansing.[4] Historians of the First World War have largely accepted Geiss's conclusions, and indeed, the recent surge of studies tying wartime imperial policy to colonial precedents has only amplified this argument. Many historians have identified this vision of a Polish 'border-strip', purged of its native inhabitants, and slated for German colonization, as the wartime culmination of Germans' growing admiration

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[1] Quoted in Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55.
[2] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 46.
[3] Ibid., 26.
[4] Ibid., 5, 33, 71. As noted above, Geiss and Fischer routinely fail to distinguish between the territorial scope of imperial policy, and the strategy of ethnic management envisioned to secure this territory.

of colonial empire and use of colonial discourse to describe Poles.[4]

The Prusso-German army has been identified by scholars as an imperial institution particularly disposed towards annexation and nationalizing imperialism. Geiss identified Germany's military leadership as a major node of support for more expansive annexations, and more radical methods of ethnic management.[5] Fischer considered the military's preference for annexations as axiomatic. As a result, he incorrectly portrayed Germany's Governor-General for occupied Poland as deeply reluctant to consider multinational imperialism.[6] More recently, Liulevicius has suggested that the military's unchallenged authority in the German-occupied Baltics resulted in the expression of particularly radical agendas of annexation, Germanization, and quasi-colonial rule in the region.[7] Hull has famously described a pathological institutional culture in the Prusso-German army, which habituated German officers to seek absolute order in wartime occupations, often through the use of disproportionate violence.[8] By extension, Hull argues that German army commanders tended to favor the direct annexation of Polish territory to Prussia. She too conflates this annexationism with the radical methods of ethnic management supported by groups like the Pan-German League.[9]

Recent scholarship has begun to contest the centrality of nationalizing models of ethnic management to German discussions of war aims in Poland. Historians like Stephan Lehnstaedt and Jesse Kauffman have demonstrated that German policy in occupied Poland reflected Berlin's serious efforts to establish and build a satellite Kingdom of Poland, one that was permanently bound to the German Empire, but also rigorously autonomous and self-governing.[10] Kauffman's work in particular has established that the German occupation government in Poland seriously pursued this option, and not an ethnically cleansed border-strip, as the empire's central war aim in Congress Poland. Indeed, German officials in Warsaw began building both institutions of Polish higher-education and the skeletons of Polish self-government during the war.[11]

However, Kauffman's work focuses on the policies and imperial ambitions of the occupation government itself. It primarily credits the Governor General for German-occupied Poland, Hans Hartwig von Beseler, with articulating and campaigning for a multinational imperial program. The OHL and imperial leadership are portrayed as somewhat reluctantly following along with Beseler's proposals, primarily because of the German Empire's acute need for manpower during the bloody summer of 1916.[12] Beseler is described as a quasi-promethean figure who introduced a fully articulated multinational program to policy-makers in Berlin, and then convinced them to adopt it.[13] Conversely, civilian and military leaders are portrayed as reluctant to adopt multinationalism, and are finally convinced only because they desired the army

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[4] For a more complete examination, please see Chapters 1 and 2.
[5] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen.*
[6] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 241. See below. Governor-General Hans Hartwig von Beseler in fact became one of Germany's most committed proponents of multinational imperialism.
[7] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[8] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.
[9] Ibid., 200–204.
[10] Stephan Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation: Occupied East Central Europe during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014); Jesse Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation: State Building and Nation Bildung in Poland during the Great War," *First World War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 65–79; Jesse Kauffman, Winson Chu, and Michael Meng, "A Sonderweg through Eastern Europe? The Varieties of German Rule in Poland during the Two World Wars," *German History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 318–44.
[11] Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Jesse Kauffman, "Sovereingty and the Search for Order in German-Occupied Poland, 1915-1918" (Stanford University, 2008).
[12] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 48; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 65.
[13] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 3–4.

that an allied Polish state might deploy in the current war.[14]

In reality, military and civilian agencies had contemplated a multinational imperial strategy long before Beseler took his position as Governor General. From August 1914 through the spring of 1916, the civilian and military leadership of the German Empire debated possible strategies for establishing control of Congress Poland and managing its population. The agencies of the German government arrived at an overwhelming consensus in support of a multinationalist model of empire, intending to establish an autonomous Kingdom of Poland in permanent military and political union with the German Empire as its suzerain. Support and opposition to the strategy did not crystalize primarily around concerns of preserving particular socio-political structures, nor did the debate pit 'moderate' civilian leaders against less restrained military commanders. These neat partitions break down in dramatic fashion. As with the public debate being waged in the pages of newspapers, journals, and books, discussion of war aims among the German Empire's civilian and military policy-makers centered on questions of ethnic management and imperial expediency. Across the empire's various agencies and commands, policy-makers supported or opposed models of ethnic management according to the same fundamental question; the extent to which they believed the German Empire could trust Poles. During the first two years of the war, German policy-makers developed confidence that Polish national identity did not equate with hostility to the German Empire, that Berlin would be able to rely upon the political and military fidelity of a Polish state, and that the risk of betrayal or subversion from Warsaw was manageable. Many policy-makers therefore judged the German-Polish union a worthy bet, often months before it became official policy in the summer of 1916.

Institutions throughout the German imperial government proved remarkably capable, even disposed towards, imagining multinational empire in Poland. As in the public sphere, the contest between nationalizing and multinational paradigms of imperialism reflected a deeper tension within German national discourse. Germany's imperial leadership wrestled with the ongoing challenge of balancing the empire's unity, integrity, and strategic security, with claims of protections for cultural diversity and political autonomy. Cataclysmic narratives of Central Europe's politically fractious past taught imperial officials to understand political and national unity as indispensible for strategic security, and raised concerns that religious and cultural heterogeneity might split imperial loyalties and threaten disaster. But equally powerful narratives, traditions, and experiences, simultaneously encouraged German policy-makers to value cultural and political heterogeneity, to understand it as compatible with imperial unity, and indeed to see federalism as a constitutional structure which guaranteed a sufficient degree of imperial cohesion. Federal nationalist discourse suggested to policy-makers that institutional protections of diversity actually strengthened imperial cohesion, even as diversity raised the cultural productivity of the empire. Germany's strategic ambitions in Congress Poland forced imperial policy-makers to suddenly confront and resolve this tension within Germany's own national and imperial narratives. In deciding the fate of Congress Poland, military and civilian leaders also decided the future course of the German Empire, how it should structure itself domestically, how it would expand and incorporate new populations, and the degree of cultural homogeneity and political centralization they considered necessary for its continued security and prosperity. In the event, federalist nationalism prevailed. Its narratives proved remarkably influential throughout Germany's imperial leadership, and made multinational imperial proposals for Poland legible. Satisfied with the German Empire's own federalist constitution, its balance of particularism and collective security, its record of effective political integration, and its own effective mobilization for the war, policy-makers in Berlin, in Warsaw, and at military headquarters all concluded that federalist imperial structures would prove sufficient to secure a German-Polish union, even as they convinced Poles that they could govern their own affairs.

The Chancellery, Foreign Office, Imperial Office of the Interior [*Reichsamt des Innern* or RAI], and Army debated multinational and nationalizing paradigms of empire from the beginning of the war. Each agency took multinationalism seriously from the outset, and

[14] Ibid., 65, 73. This also echoes earlier descriptions of Berlin's choice to establish a satellite Kingdom of Poland. See Martin Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich: Ehrenwirth, 1963), 145.

increasingly favored this paradigm for several reasons. First, nationalizing imperialism could not promise the same strategic advantages of multinational empire. It was never considered as a viable model for ruling all of Congress Poland, and it did not promise to furnish the German Empire with yet another federal army for its arsenal. German policy-makers also increasingly doubted nationalizing policies of ethnic management, and worried that they would actually undermine German security. Wartime study convinced many that colonization, political oppression, and linguistic Germanization would most likely provoke sustained resistance to German hegemony, without making any tangible security gains. Though ethnic cleansing in theory promised a final resolution to the security paradox in Poland, most officials proved unwilling to accept such a radical course. By the summer of 1915, therefore, even proponents of annexation had begun to abandon nationalizing methods of ethnic management for more ethnically neutral statist policies.

Finally, the German Empire's experiences with governing Polish-speaking populations appeared to validate the belief that Polish national identity could be compatible with loyalty to the German Empire. Prussia's successful wartime mobilization of its Polish populations alone sufficed to convince many commanders and civilian officials that Poles could be trusted, and would not subvert or betray the German Empire for their own nationalist agenda. Experiences gleaned during the occupation of Congress Poland only reinforced this conclusion. Observing the political climate of Congress Poland, and interacting with the occupied population on a daily basis, the German occupation administration concluded that Poles were competent to run their own affairs, politically reasonable, and not intractably hostile to the German Empire. Their experiences further convinced them that national political discourse in Poland could be effectively manipulated by building collaborative relationships with relatively small cadres of social, intellectual, cultural, and political elites. Both findings led them to believe that Polish leaders would accept a grand bargain proposed by Berlin and view a German-Polish union as a legitimate instrument to defend their own autonomy.

Berlin's Improvisation of War Aims for Congress Poland in the First Months of the War

The German Army's dramatic advances through Belgium and Northern France in August and September of 1914 sparked hopes for a rapid and decisive victory, and inspired the first serious discussion of war aims in Berlin. The French counterattack on the Marne in early September, followed by a series of operations on the Aisne and the dramatic "race to the sea" eventually dashed these hopes by mid-October. Though heavy fighting on the western front continued through late November, the opportunity to turn the Entente's left flank had been lost. During these first months of the conflict military and civilian agencies already received memoranda, brochures, and proposals from the German public advocating both nationalizing and multinationalist schemes of imperial aggrandizement. The civilian and military leadership of the empire also began to debate the merits of each approach for securing their objectives in Russian Poland. Berlin arrived at no firm decisions during this time. The annexation of a border-strip, an Austro-Polish solution, and a Polish satellite state all remained on the table. However, when rapid victory appeared within grasp, Germany's civilian leadership seriously contemplated the creation of a Polish state under German suzerainty. At the same time, prominent multinational imperialists came to occupy influential positions in the developing wartime government, especially in its foreign policy and nascent press and intelligence apparatus.

Tellingly, Berlin's first instinct on Polish policy during the war was to make public gestures of common cause with Polish nationals. The three empires which had partitioned Poland in the 18th century each rushed to recruit the collaboration of Poles opposite their front, and inspire nationalist revolts behind their adversaries lines.[15] On 14 August, the Grand Prince Nikolai, grandson of Tsar Nicholas I and commander in chief of the Russian forces, published a "Manifesto to the Polish Nation", promising that the Russian Empire would reunite the Polish lands and restore political autonomy under personal union with the Tsar.[16] In the Austro-

[15] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 24.
[16] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 26.

Hungarian Empire, Polish nationalists quickly began mobilizing volunteer units to march against Russia with Vienna's tacit approval.[17] Their ranks were bolstered on 16 August with the incorporation of Józef Piłsudski's riflemen.[18] Soon, Vienna formalized the relationship, merging the units into the Austro-Hungarian chain of command as a Polish Legion.[19] In parallel, a newly organized national committee in Kraków began noisy agitation for the absorption of Congress Poland into the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[20] Even German propaganda called upon Poles to cast off the yoke of their Russian oppressors and support the Central Powers.[21] On 31 July, the Kaiser also assured the Polish count and member of the Prussian House of Lords, Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, of his intention to restore a Polish state in the event of war.[22] In early August, the Kaiser actually preempted the Grand Prince's manifesto, calling upon the residents of Congress Poland to revolt against Tsarism.[23]

The Kaiser's proclamation did not spark any pro-German revolution in Congress Poland. One could blame this on Pole's distrust of Prussia, stoked by decades of *Ostmarkenpolitik*, or Petrograd's skillful use of the razing of Kalisz to portray German forces as anti-Slavic marauders. Certainly these contributed. But Polish Russians' unwillingness to revolt also reflected the durability of loyalties to the Russian Empire, the motive weakness of Polish nationalism among most of the region's population, and the practical advisability of not committing treason while the state was actively maneuvering divisions of trained and heavily armed soldiers into the territory.

Indeed Polish minorities revolted nowhere. In each of the partitions, imperial loyalism and practical calculations outweighed nationalist fantasies for the moment. In Congress Poland, the peasantry, disillusioned with their noble landlords and suspicious of Polish nationalists, remained conspicuously loyal to the Tsar.[24] Varsovians showered Cossack units with flowers as they departed for the front.[25] In one town, an observer reported witnessing Polish conscripts mobilizing at muster points, even after the responsible Russian authorities had fled the area in a panic.[26] Despite Piłsudski's extensive preparations of conspiratorial networks and cells before the war, his brief paramilitary incursion into Congress Poland on 6 August ended in embarrassing failure. During their 6 August march on Kielce, Piłsudski's "cavalry" contingent carried their saddles on their heads, confident that civilian population would gift them mounts.[27] Instead the locals shuttered their houses and refused to supply or even greet the riflemen. A brief skirmish with a local Russian patrol drove the irregulars from Kielce. Piłsudski's riflemen abandoned Congress Poland within a fortnight.[28]

As noted in chapter 1, Germany also experienced a remarkably smooth mobilization. Far from attempting to disrupt the German war effort, Polish Prussian's marched dutifully to war alongside their German-speaking countrymen. Berlin's initial overtures to its own minority probably reinforced Polish loyalties to some extent. The Kaiser, Chancellery, and RAI introduced no new policies designed to police or surveil Prussia's Polish-speaking minority. Concerned about Polish commitment to the empire, Kaiser Wilhelm II petitioned the Vatican in late July to install the conservative and loyalist Pole, Edward Likowski, as the new Archbishop of Posen-Gnesen.[29] The newly installed Archbishop rewarded the Kaiser's compromise by publically sanctioning the conflict with Russia as a "Just War" in accordance with Catholic

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[17] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 26.
[18] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 381.
[19] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 27.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 25.
[22] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 114.
[23] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 7–8.
[24] Ibid., 49.
[25] Ibid., 68.
[26] Ibid., 67.
[27] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:382.
[28] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 28, 68; Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:382.
[29] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 25.

theology, and calling upon his flock to take up arms against the invader.[30]

However, recent research has suggested that the influence of Polish nationalism on popular mobilization in the partitioning powers has long been overstated. Historians of the German Empire have been especially willing to suggest that the absence of Polish resistance in the Autumn of 1914 demonstrates that the Poles were "too clever to make their sympathies for the Entente known", and that Polish Germans marched to war with reluctance and even subversive intent.[31] However, the pervasive claims of patriotic shirking or sabotage of the German war effort contradict the basic fact of low overall desertion rates among Polish units in the Prussian army.[32] The evidentiary basis for Polish sympathies for the Entente has generally reproduced the arguments of contemporary German nationalists, and even cited their spurious complaints about inadequate display of the German flag.[33] As Julia Eichenberg has pointed out, this narrative of heroic and universal national resistance emerged after the war, sanctioned by the new Polish republic as a foundational myth, and reinforced by millions of Polish veterans looking to somehow reinterpret their service to the partitioning powers as a patriotic act.[34]

More important, for our purposes, is how German officials read the political sentiments of Polish Prussians in the autumn of 1914. Echoing multinationalist authors, authorities in Berlin often interpreted the smooth mobilization a proof of Polish loyalism, and therefore began to more seriously contemplate reforming Prussian policy. On 15 October 1914, the Undersecretary of State of the Prussian Interior Ministry, Wilhelm (Bill) Drews, passed a report by the Police President of Berlin to the Chancellor. The Police President reported that a representative from Austria had recently visited a Polish *Sokolverein* meeting in Berlin, and asked its members if they had organized paramilitary units like their counterparts in Galicia.[35] His subject had responded that the German *Sokol* were neither armed nor trained, and that they could not form their own legion as most Polish men were already serving in the Prussian army.[36] One could naturally question the veracity of this statement, or the motives of the Polish Prussian making it, but Drews seems to have taken it at face value, and relayed it to the Chancellery without comment. One memorandum circulating within the Chancellery in late October stated bluntly that non-German minorities had "loyally" participated in general mobilization. Having showed such loyalty "to the state", the memorandum urged Berlin to abolish all "exceptional legislation" directed against Poles.[37]

Throughout the eastern rim of the German Empire, a range of high-ranking Prussian bureaucrats also recognized that Polish Prussians were fulfilling their duties as German citizens and loyally fighting to defend the empire. Preexisting tensions caused some initial friction between the Prussian state and its Polish citizens. Before the war, local authorities had sometimes compiled lists of Polish leaders to arrest in the event of mobilization. In the first days of the war, overeager police in Upper Silesia arrested several of these leading Poles and inspired furious complaints from Polish politicians in Berlin.[38] However, Prussian administrators in the same region soon wrote that Poles seemed positively enthusiastic to fight for the empire.

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[30] Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* CXXVI, no. 522 (2011): 1142.
[31] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 21.
[32] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1147, 1159.
[33] See especially Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 21.
[34] Julia Eichenberg, "Consent, Coercion and Endurance in Eastern Europe: Poland and the Fluidity of War Experiences," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 235–38, 252.
[35] Wilhelm Drews, "Berlin Police Report on Sokolverein Gathering, 15 October 1914," October 15, 1914, 144–45, R43/1397a, BArch.
[36] Ibid., 145.
[37] Chancellery, "Memorandum on Imperial Domestic Political Reform Following the War," October 27, 1914, 153, R43/2476, BArch.
[38] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 21.

Reflecting on mobilization, the district president of Oppeln, Friedrich Ernst von Schwerin*, reported to the Oberpräsident of Silesia in January 1915 that Polish soldiers had hurried "joyfully" to the German flag, "animated by the same enthusiasm and love of the Fatherland as his German compatriot".[39] More iron-clad confirmation of Polish fidelity came from the leadership of the Prussian provinces of Posen and West Prussia. Before the war, these regions had been the traditional hotbeds of Polish nationalist politics. Already on 11 August 1914, the newly minted Oberpräsident of Posen, Hans von Eisenhart-Rothe, reported to the Prussian Minister of the interior that Poles in the region had shown a "completely patriotic and loyal attitude during mobilization".[40] His colleague the Oberpräsident of the Province of West Prussia, Ernst von Jagow, actually went further, reporting to Berlin that "a not inconsiderable number of Poles' [are] volunteering for the army".[41] A considerable segment of responsible Prussian authorities were therefore impressed by Polish fidelity during and after mobilization, and passed these perceptions along to Berlin.

As German units marched westward and checked the Russian advance into East Prussia, the civilian *Reichsleitung* began contemplating its options for how to secure its strategic objectives in Congress Poland from both the Russian army and the prospect of Polish national mobilization. The first serious discussions on how to create durable German influence over Polish territory thus coincided with Prussia's successful mobilization and the wave of relief over Polish loyalism. Supporters of nationalization still submitted their own recommendations in this period, including Heinrich Claß's now infamous memorandum calling for the annexation and ethnic cleansing of a Polish border-strip.[42] However, fortified in their confidence that Polish national identity could be compatible with loyalty to the German Empire, authorities throughout the government submitted proposals for cooperating with Polish nationalists as a means for Germany's future imperial control. Indeed, the basic skeleton of a German-Polish union is already evident among these early proposals. One memorandum circulating in the Chancellery in September 1914 called for Germany to "make a Kingdom of Poland from Russian Poland, which is bound to Germany through treaties for all time, - in case of war against Russia, tariff union, etc.".[43] The proposal in question even called upon Berlin to fortify this satellite Polish Kingdom by granting it territory in White Ruthenia.[44]

Influential Catholics in the imperial government immediately began lobbying the Chancellery to consider multinational solutions to the Polish question. This was not surprising given prominence of Catholicism in Poland, the influence of Catholic universalist theology, and the long collaborative relationship between the Center Party and Polish Reichstag deputies. Only two weeks after the war began, Albrecht von Rechenberg submitted his first memorandum on the Polish question to the Chief of the Imperial Chancellery, Undersecretary of State Arnold Wahnschaffe. Rechenberg, descended from an important Catholic aristocratic line with a long history of service in the Prussian state, had joined the Foreign Office and serving as a colonial administrator in Tanga and Zanzibar in the 1890s.[45] He had served the Foreign Office in Moscow and Warsaw, becoming an authority on Eastern Europe and eventually taking over the position of consul-general for Warsaw in 1905.[46] Germany's 1906 wave of colonial reformism washed

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* Not to be confused with Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm von Schwerin, the District President of Frankfurt an der Oder, a proponent of nationalizing imperialism in Poland. Both descended from the von Schwerin line of nobility from Mecklenburg and Pommerania.

[39] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1143.

[40] Ibid., 1142.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 71.

[43] Chancellery, "Memorandum on War Aims," September 1914, 102, R43/2476, BArch. The phrase "in case of war against Russia" suggests the author was thinking of a permanent military and foreign policy union. I.e. the Kingdom of Poland would join the German army "in case of war against Russia".

[44] Ibid.

[45] L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1977), 139.

[46] Ibid.; Juhani Koponen, *Development for Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania 1884-1914*, Finish Historical Society Studia Historica (Helsinki: Distributor, Tiedekirja, 1994), 269.

Rechenberg back into colonial service as the governor of German East Africa. While his policies mitigated some of the worst abuses of his predecessors, his regime still provided no legal protections for indigenes, and continued to tolerate coercive labor practices.[47] By 1914 he had been elected as a moderate deputy for the Center Party in Prussia.[48] Aristocratic and conservative in outlook, he supported the preservation of Germany's authoritarian constitution. When war broke out in 1914, he was a veteran expert on both colonial and Eastern European affairs with close professional ties to the Foreign Office.[49]

Telling then, that Rechenberg stridently opposed annexing Polish territory in his communications with the Chancellery in the autumn of 1914. Rechenberg and Wahnschaffe had begun discussing the possibility of instigating a Polish revolt against Russia during the first fortnight of the war.[50] In his 15 August memorandum, Rechenberg emphasized the strategic import of Polish national sentiment, warning that Russia hoped to organize its Polish subjects for a "guerilla war against us".[51] To avoid this, Rechenberg recommended renouncing any intention to annex and Germanize Polish territory.[52] Instead, he urged Berlin to support the creation of a fully independent Polish buffer-state, and to arm and organize Polish volunteers to fight the Russian Empire.[53] Though not formally attached to the German Empire, Rechenberg hoped that the need for protection from Russian revanchism would compel the small Polish state to depend upon Germany.[54] Rechenberg's first instinct, therefore, was not to dominate Polish territory, but rather harness Polish nationalism and attempt to build a collaborative bi-lateral relationship.

So confident was Rechenberg that a Polish state would be friendly to Berlin's interests that he first proposed expanding Poland eastward in a second memo on 27 August. Specifically he suggested that a new Kingdom of Poland should include Western Grodno, perhaps even taking the northern governorates of Kovno, and Courland on the Baltic coast.[55] The German Empire, Rechenberg assured the Chancellery, need not worry about a powerful Polish Kingdom on their border. The attachment of these territories would distract Polish nationalists with the task of colonizing, developing, and Polonizing White Ruthenian and Lithuanian territory.[56] Moreover, Warsaw would be so concerned with defending its independence from Petrograd, that it would not dare press nationalist claims to Prussian territory.[57] Here Rechenberg also began to consider the possibility of establishing Germany's formal leadership over a new Polish state, and floated the idea of a Central European security community.[58]

Rechenberg's colleague in the Center Party, Matthias Erzberger was perhaps the first major political figure to overtly support the creation of a Polish Kingdom under German Suzerainty. By 1914, Erzberger was already a figure of considerable weight in imperial politics, and his influence on Germany's foreign policy and intelligence apparatus would only grow during the war. Since his election to the Reichstag in 1903, Erzberger had risen quickly through the ranks to a position of party leadership. He first demonstrated his expertise on colonial matters when he famously dressed down the Colonial Department on the Reichstag floor for its mismanagement and violent rule in Africa. But Erzberger did not oppose German imperial strength per se. After rising into the *Fraktionsführung* of the Center Party, he had closely worked with the German army to support Ludendorff's program of military buildup in 1912 and 1913. He thereby gained a reputation as a civilian politician with one of the most comprehensive

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[47] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 269; Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884-1914*, 140.
[48] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 270.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Albrecht von Rechenberg, "Letter to Under-Secretary of State Arnold Wahnschaffe, 15 August 1914," August 15, 1914, 8, R43/2476, BArch.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 8–9.
[53] Ibid., 10–11.
[54] Ibid., 8–11.
[55] Albrecht von Rechenberg, "Letter to Under-Secretary of State Arnold Wahnschaffe, 27 August 1914," August 27, 1914, 15, R43/2476, BArch.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 14.

understandings of military affairs. In the same period, Erzberger developed a close personal and professional relationship with Chancellor Theobald v. Bethmann Hollweg. The Chancellor held Erzberger's imaginative and decisive intellect in high esteem, and apart from enjoying his company, probably hoped the friendship would help secure the support of the politically indispensible Center Party.[59] For all of these reasons, Erzberger wielded influence on Bethmann Hollweg out of any proportion to his official position. Bethmann Hollweg gave Erzberger special confidence in his judgement, and ex-Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow reported that the two dined together at least once a week.[60]

Given Erzberger's experience with both colonial and military affairs and his contacts with international Catholicism, the Admiralty and Foreign Office approached Erzberger in the third week of August with the task of organizing Germany's propaganda effort for neutral countries.[61] With funding from the Foreign Office, Erzberger established offices across from the Berlin Zoo at Budapesterstraße 14, and quickly organized a network of German sympathizers to distribute Berlin's take on the war throughout Europe.[62] In an ironic twist, Erzberger's international Catholic contacts, so maligned before the war by anti-Ultramontanes as cogs of a vast anti-German conspiracy, were now incorporated into a machine which both disseminated German propaganda and effectively gathered foreign intelligence on the political climates of Germany's rivals and neighbors.[63] Of course Erzberger concentrated special effort on Russian Poland, where he cultivated a particularly reliable network. One of his first acts in office was to build Berlin's official relationship with Prussia's two main conciliationist Polish newspapers.[64] The first, Wiktor Kulerski's West Prussian based *Gazeta Grudziądzka*, enjoyed a massive circulation of 130,000 and was effectively the single most popular Polish language newspaper in the world. It served as the center of Kulerski's own anti-Endek Polish Catholic People's Party.[65] The second, Adam Napieralski's influential *Katolik,* centered in Upper Silesia also maintained an impressive daily circulation of 50,000.[66] Erzberger concluded agreements with both, pledging the free circulation of both papers in German-occupied Polish territory and their privileged access to war related news in exchange for their complete cooperation with German censors and their reliable propagation of anti-Russian Polish nationalism.[67] While debate in Berlin continued over the Empire's objectives and strategies of ethnic management in Poland, Erzberger had already effectively committed Germany to a propaganda policy of stoking pro-German Polish nationalism. Throughout the war, Erzberger's Polish newspapers would increasingly support political rapprochement with Germany. They also channeled a substantial amount of Political intelligence on Congress Poland into Berlin through the sympathetic Erzberger.

Erzberger's friendship with the German Chancellor, his known mastery of military and imperial matters, and his special access to knowledge of political conditions in Poland all made his opinion on the Polish question influential, and increasingly so. On 2 September 1914, Matthias Erzberger produced the first rough sketch of a German multinationalist program for Eastern Europe in a memorandum he submitted to the Chancellor.[68] Erzberger too encouraged Berlin to secure German "military hegemony on the continent".[69] In the East, he insisted that German security would be achieved by the "liberation of the non-Russian ethnic groups from the

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[59] Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 97–98.
[60] Ibid., 97.
[61] Ibid., 98.
[62] Ibid., 100.
[63] Ibid., 163.
[64] James Bjork, "A Polish Mitteleuropa?: Upper Silesia's Conciliationists and the Prospect of German Victory," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 29, no. 3 (2001): 480; James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 180.
[65] Bjork, "A Polish Mitteleuropa?," 479.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 480.
[68] Matthias Erzberger, "Memorandum on War Aims, 5 September 1914," September 5, 1914, 25, R43/2476, BArch.
[69] Ibid., 25–26.

Muscovian yoke, and the granting of domestic self-administration to these individual ethnic groups" under the "military suzerainty of Germany".[70] Given the strategic centrality of Congress Poland, Erzberger afforded it special consideration. Unlike Rechenberg Erzberger insisted that a completely independent Polish state would be unpredictable and ultimately injurious to Berlin's interests. It would, he lamented, likely become a "Polish Serbia", intent on reclaiming Prussian territory and liable to draw in foreign sponsors to assist in this venture.[71] Instead, Erzberger proposed erecting an autonomous state on the current territory of Congress Poland, and bring it into permanent multinational union with Germany. This new Kingdom of Poland would join into a "confederation" with the German Empire, one which guaranteed the "military suzerainty of the Kaiser in perpetuity".[72] Warsaw would be responsible for all matters of domestic governance in the new state. Erzberger emphasized the necessity of true Polish autonomy, and insisted that the new Kingdom of Poland would need to be ruled by its own, independent, and Catholic royal dynasty.[73] Indeed, Erzberger suggested that Congress Poles might exercise a degree of political influence on the new confederation. Although the Kaiser, Reichstag, and Bundesrat would need to retain authority over all matters of common military organization and foreign policy, Erzberger suggested that Polish representatives might be allowed to vote on social and economic legislation in a common imperial parliament.[74]

Erzberger understood multinational union with an autonomous Polish state much as intellectuals like Naumann, Rohrbach, and Gothein eventually would. That is, he saw the creation of a Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty as the only realistic way of achieving Germany's military objectives in Poland without producing a chronic source of nationalist resistance to the German Empire. He wielded multinational imperialism as a tool for projecting German power over politically sophisticated national cultures. Erzberger feared that outright annexation would incense Congress Poles, who were already politically organized and more than capable of offering sustained resistance to Berlin. In Lithuania and the Baltic Littoral, where he considered the populations less politically regimented along ethnic lines, Erzberger was willing to entertain more intrusive methods of German hegemony. He insisted that Berlin should demand their cession from Russia, but equivocated as to whether Prussia should simply annex the northern territories, or craft them into autonomous states under German suzerainty.[75] For Erzberger, the proper strategy for securing Berlin's supremacy depended solely upon the local influence of nationalist politics and the likelihood that nationalist agitators could organize effective resistance to Germanization. In the same memorandum, Erzberger outright denied that the German Empire needed any more settlement colonies.[76]

Erzberger's memo might have shaped Bethmann Hollweg's own initial approaches to imperial extension. The Chancellery received Erzberger's memorandum on 6 September 1914. The Chancellor acknowledged his receipt and thanked Erzberger for his efforts on the same day, stating that he read the document with interest.[77] On 9 September, at the high-pitch of German military success, Bethmann Hollweg circulated his now famous "guidelines of our policy" for the forthcoming peace-negotiations to the State Secretary of the RAI. Those responsible for drafting this "September Program" at General Headquarters were among Bethmann Hollweg's closest personal advisors. Gerhard von Mutius, the Chancellor's cousin and an experienced functionary of the Foreign Office with postings in Paris, Petersburg, and Constantinople, was put to the task.[78] Kurt Riezler, the son of a Catholic family from Munich, had earned his doctorate in economic history before also entering the Foreign Office in 1907. After Bethmann Hollweg took

[70] Ibid., 30.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 31.
[73] Ibid., 30.
[74] Ibid., 31.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 33.
[77] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Matthias Erzberger, 6 September 1914," September 6, 1914, 37, R43/2476, BArch.
[78] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 99.

office, Riezler had become his personal secretary and one of his chief advisors.[79] In the years before the war, Riezler had regularly sparred with Germany's militarist and extreme-nationalist press.[80] In September 1914, he too became one of the chief architects of Germany's initial war aims.[81] The September Program represented a provisional draft of war aims for discussion and refinement among the *Reichsleitung*, OHL, and Prussian government. Nonetheless, it gestures towards the strategies of ethnic management the contemplated by the Chancellor and his closest Foreign Policy confidants for organizing Polish space. It was an imperial model produced by career foreign policy specialists with the collaboration of the German Chancellor, and thus a representative artifact of imperial institutional culture.

Whether Riezler, Mutius, and Bethmann Hollweg were directly influenced by Erzberger's recent memorandum, or they drafted the September Program according to their own ideas, they proposed a multinational model of imperial rule over Russian Poland. As an exploratory draft, the September Program was actually remarkably vague in its recommendations for reorganizing Germany's Eastern frontier. To secure Germany in the East, the Chancellor stated that Russia must be "forced back from the German border to the greatest extent possible and its dominion over the non-Russian vassal-nations [*Vasallenvölker*] broken".[82] To replace Russian sovereignty, the Chancellery suggested establishing a loose Central European economic association to include a Polish state, under the de-facto leadership of Germany.[83] The September Program notably did not suggest annexing Polish territory and ruling it through Germanization or rote force of arms. Though Bethmann Hollweg and his staff did not exactly hewn to Erzberger's recent recommendations, they did propose a model of imperial influence based upon the close institutional collaboration of the German Empire and a Polish state.

Not that the idea of nationalizing imperialism hadn't occurred to the Chancellery. In his attached comments on the program to Clemens von Delbrück, Bethmann Hollweg actually suggested "evacuating" annexed territories in Belgium and France and colonizing these territories with retired military personnel.[84] The Chancellor admitted that he found the idea "captivating", though he realized already that it would entail "great difficulties" if ever attempted.[85] Bethmann Hollweg's commentary confirms that the Chancellery was not, as of September, considering a nationalizing imperial paradigm for Congress Poland.

As the armies of the Kaiser stormed through northern and central France, Policy-makers in Berlin drafted their first maps for reorganizing Congress Poland. Even at this moment of apparent triumph, the civilian leadership of the empire often perceived Polish nationalism more as a potential asset than an inherent threat. The astounding success of domestic mobilization only confirmed this impression. Although nationalizing imperialists started to articulate proposals for annexing and Germanizing Polish space, Berlin's first instinct was towards multinational imperialism in Poland. As the weight of the Marne reversal became evident, and subsequent operations failed to knock France from the war, the September Program was shelved. But the debate over how to achieve German objectives in Poland resumed, and generals, bureaucrats, and diplomats continued under different strategic conditions.

German Policy-Makers Contemplate Ruling Annexations in Poland, Autumn 1914-Summer 1915

By the end of October 1914, Germany's prospects for a rapid victory had evaporated, and the war settled into a period of indecisive grappling for advantage. Heavy fighting continued in the East before the front stabilized for winter. In late October, the Russian Army repulsed the

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[79] Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918: Zweiter Band, Machtstaat vor der Demokratie*, vol. II (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992), 238.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., II:803.
[82] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Aufzeichnung über die Richtlinien unserer Politik beim Friedensschluss," September 9, 1914, 50, R43/2476, BArch.
[83] Ibid., 52.
[84] Ibid., 47.
[85] Ibid.

German counterstroke towards Warsaw, but took heavy casualties in the process. In November, the German Ninth Army checked the final major offensive of the season towards Upper Silesia, and in a series of confused maneuvers, ultimately took Łódź. As peace began to seem more remote, and potential victory perhaps less total, policy-makers in Berlin carefully reconsidered what objectives were achievable in Congress Poland, and what imperial structures would best serve German ends.

Berlin had particularly strong incentives in this period to seek discrete territorial annexations in Congress Poland. The *Reichsleitung* pondered a separate peace with Russia to extricate itself from the two-front war. German troops did not yet occupy all, or even most of Congress Poland, and Germany would therefore likely only obtain discrete territorial concessions in any peace deal. Berlin therefore explored what minimal concessions in Poland might secure the German border without scuttling peace negotiations. Some even considered claiming no territory in Congress Poland, though this was never a celebrated option.[86] Limited annexations would not offer a viable basis for Polish statehood, much less multinational union. Poles were unlikely to regard such a truncated state as a satisfying realization of Polish statehood.

Limited annexations thus required a different strategy of ethnic management, and faced German policymakers with an unattractive choice. Berlin could either administer new territory as provinces of Prussia, perhaps rescinding some or all of its anti-Polish policies, and hope that Polish unrest would not destabilize the region. Or, Berlin could adopt a more proactive nationalizing agenda, administering Poles as a legally subjugated class, colonizing the region with German settlers, or even expelling Poles. Remarkably, even as policy-makers contemplated annexations in this period, they generally resisted adopting nationalizing models of imperialism, especially radical methods like expulsion. Reducing territorial demands, attempting to improve relations with local Poles, or even returning the territory to Russia were all floated to avoid the unsavory consequences of homogenization. In the ongoing debate about ethnic management, an increasing number of policy-makers in Berlin also began supporting a multinational model of imperialism in Poland, even if it meant delaying the conclusion of a separate peace.

Berlin's interest in a separate peace with the Russian Empire naturally focused discussions in the Foreign Office and Chancellery on how to define and govern the minimal territorial concessions that Germany would require to fortify its eastern frontier. Both Bethmann Hollweg and the Chief of the General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn broadly favored demanding strategic annexations along the German-Polish border.[87] Voices in the Chancellery were certainly concerned with the political reliability of resident Poles. Both Wahnschaffe and State Secretary Delbrück were aware of reports on Congress Poland, which emphasized the entrenched Russian loyalism of Poles, and their rabid anti-Germanism. Though they considered the reports somewhat exaggerated, both expressed concern and worried about how to govern such a potentially unruly population.[88] Nationalist intellectuals felt they had a ready solution to the problem, and continued to submit proposals to various imperial offices calling upon the empire to govern the Poles as colonial subjects, to flood annexed regions with German settlers and schoolteachers and thus transform it into a "strong Germanic bulwark", or even to seize Polish land and dragoon its owners eastward.[89] Friedrich von Schwerin submitted his infamous proposals in this period.

Although the desire for a separate peace made annexations attractive, multinationalist intellectuals and factions within the imperial government continued to agitate against nationalizing imperialism in Congress Poland. Matthias Erzberger still pressed Bethmann Hollweg to commit to a multinational imperial program for Poland and sponsor corresponding reforms to Prussia's domestic policies. After establishing his offices on Budapesterstraße, Erzberger's responsibility in the wartime government and his de facto influence on imperial policy had only continued to grow. In October 1914, Erzberger played an instrumental role in

[86] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 184.
[87] Ibid., 198.
[88] Arnold Wahnschaffe, "Summary and Comments on 'Die Orientierung Der Polen Während Des Krieges,'" December 30, 1914, 26, R1501/119779, BArch; Olesnicki, "'Die Orientierung der Polen während des Krieges,'" December 1914, 28–29, R1501/119779, BArch.
[89] Schumacher, "Memorandum on German War Aims," November 16, 1914, 184–85, R43/2476, BArch.

establishing the *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst*, a new bureau to consolidate and coordinate the empire's host of nascent propaganda agencies. Erzberger took command of the new Zentralstelle, which technically had authority over his own Foreign Office outfit.[90]

Tellingly, Erzberger recruited a host of multinationalist intellectuals to head the new propaganda authority. He employed Paul Rohrbach and Ernst Jäckh on the board of directors of the new agency, and tasked Rohrbach with organizing the organization's working group on Eastern Europe.[91] This effectively gave Rohrbach an institutional vehicle for promoting his increasingly multinationalist vision of empire. By the time he entered service in the Foreign Office, Rohrbach was already an outspoken proponent of inciting a revolt in Congress Poland against Petrograd. He envisioned restoring a Poland as part of a larger strategy of *Randstaatenpolitik*.[92] During this period of stalemate, Rohrbach vehemently opposed a separate peace with Russia, which he saw as premature, and inveighed against nationalizing models of empire.[93] He instead promoted the incorporation of a Polish state into a German-led alliance system.[94] Rohrbach became one of the leading voices for multinational imperialism in German foreign policy, and Prince Max von Baden later spoke of a growing "Rohrbach-circle" in the Foreign Office.[95] The *Zentralstelle* gave multinational imperialists a seat at the table in Berlin, and gave them channel through which they could regularly voice their proposals for reorganizing Poland and Eastern Europe to the highest levels of German government. *Zentralstelle* staff met daily with Wahnschaffe and top diplomats in the Foreign Office to discuss propaganda and foreign intelligence, and Foreign Office staff generally developed a high opinion of Erzberger.[96]

The Chancellor's trust in Erzberger also grew. Bethmann Hollweg regularly admitted Erzberger to high-level policy meetings, including all secret conferences Foreign Office, Admiralty, and Prussian War Ministry.[97] The Chancellor's confidence in Erzberger was confirmed, in this period, by his delegation of essential diplomatic missions to Erzberger personally. Erzberger assumed responsibility for managing German relations with Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Vatican.[98] Erzberger's recommendations for Poland, therefore, did not represent the scribbling of a parliamentary agitator, but the serious proposals of a key figure in Germany's foreign policy apparatus, one with the personal confidence of the Chancellor.

In his communications to the Chancellery and Foreign Office in late 1914 and early 1915, Erzberger continued to emphasize the imperial loyalty of Germany's Polish minority, and insist on the possibility of reconciliation between the German Empire and Polish nationalism. On 20 October 1914, Erzberger forwarded a new memorandum to the Chancellery, calling for Prussia to permit Poles to receive religious instruction in public schools in their mother tongue.[99] In Upper Silesia, the memo argued, two political movements were presently fighting for influence over resident Poles: moderate conservatives and democratic radicals.[100] Fulfilling Pole's heartfelt wish for vernacular religious instruction would prove the potential of loyalist reform, strengthen the conservatives and simultaneously undercut nationalist grievances.[101]

At the same time, Erzberger pressed his influence in military circles. On 28 October

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[90] Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy*, 104.
[91] Ibid.Epstein 104.
[92] Paul Rohrbach, "Unsere Gegner," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (August 15, 1914): 546; Paul Rohrbach, *Der Krieg und die deutsche Politik* (Dresden: Verlag "Das grössere Deutschland," 1914).
[93] Paul Rohrbach, "Sorge, Weg und Wille," *Das größere Deutschland* 1 (September 26, 1914): 759; Paul Rohrbach, "Friedensgerüchte – Friedensgefahr," *Das größere Deutschland* 2 (January 16, 1915): 65.
[94] Rohrbach, "Friedensgerüchte – Friedensgefahr," 65; Paul Rohrbach, *Russland und wir* (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1916).
[95] Paul Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift: Zwei Menschenalter erlebter Weltgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hans Dulk, 1953), 203.
[96] Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy*, 104.
[97] Ibid., 98.
[98] Ibid., 118–38.
[99] Matthias Erzberger, "Die Erteilung der Relgionsunterrichtes in der Muttersprache in oberschlesischen Volksschulen," October 20, 1914, 147, 158, R43/1397a, BArch.
[100] Ibid., 158.
[101] Ibid., 158–59.

1914, he sent a letter to the Prussian Minister of War, and the new Chief of the General Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn. Erzberger sought to assure the OHL that Polish Russians were dissatisfied with Tsarist rule, and therefore represented potential collaborators and sympathizers with the Central Powers. Though Polish Russians had not revolted against the Tsar, or sabotaged his war effort, Erzberger argued that this was to be expected from any population who feared the return of Petrograd's rule and subsequent punishment for treason.[102] He also suggested equipping the Polish Legions with German weaponry and logistical support.[103]

Erzberger also acted as an intermediary between the *Reichsleitung* and Polish nationalists, with the aim of building trust between the two parties.[104] On 24 September 1914, he organized a meeting between Theodor Lewald, representing the RAI; Władysław Sikorski, one of the organizers of the Polish Legions; and Wojciech Korfanty, the Polish politician from Upper Silesia. The Poles' main design was to convince Berlin that they could be trusted as faithful allies and to solicit assistance for their own national objectives. Korfanty and Sikorski assured Lewald of the continuing "most loyal and forthcoming support of the German army by the Polish population".[105] According to Lewald's report to the RAI, Sikorski and Korfanty expressed their preference for a Polish buffer-state, whose borders encompassed Vilnius, Grodno, and Minsk, over an Austro-Polish solution.[106] Lewald further reported that the conversation had suggested that such a Polish state would accept an alliance with either Austria-Hungary or Germany.[107]

Nonetheless, with the prospect of seizing all of Congress Poland seemingly remote, German civilian leaders thoroughly explored annexationist options. The Chancellery and RAI therefore solicited input on the Polish question from leading intellectuals and functionaries, while manuevering to keep their options open. Wahnschaffe explored multiple avenues for achieving German objectives in Poland. There is no doubt that Wahnschaffe seriously explored nationalizing imperial models, and even contemplated securing conquered territory through ethnic cleansing. In early December he approached Hugo Ganse, the former president of the Prussian Settlement Commission for Posen and West-Prussia, and asked him to draft a policy proposal for Congress Poland. The resulting program called for annexations along the German border and securing this territory through evacuations.[108] Wahnschaffe similarly requested input from Max Sering, one of the leading intellectual voices of internal colonization.[109] He also sought the expertise of the relatively moderate *Oberpräsident* of Posen, Eisenhart-Rothe, in late December 1914. However, even here Wahnschaffe noted his concerns over the difficulties associated with large-scale civilian evacuations.[110]

Wahnschaffe also approached Friedrich von Schwerin, the district president of Frankfurt an der Oder, proud member of the Pan-German League, and chairman of the Society for the Support of Internal Colonization.[111] In response Schwerin produced two memorandum over the course of 1915, calling for the further colonization of the Prussian *Ostmark*, the annexation of Polish territory adjacent to the German border, and the expulsion of resident Poles to permanently secure this territory for the German Empire.[112] Schwerin's proposed territorial demands were extensive. They included both territory in northern Congress Poland, namely Suwałki and the territory behind the Bobr-Narew-Vistula line, as well as the space west of the Warta river to shield Berlin from future Russian incursions.[113]

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[102] Matthias Erzberger, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 28 October 1914," October 28, 1914, 9, R1501/119831, BArch.
[103] Wandel, "Kriegsministerium Memorandum on the Polish Legion for Ober Ost," n.d., 3, R1501/119831, BArch.
[104] Theodor Lewald, "Report to the Imperial Office of the Interior, 24 September 1914," September 24, 1914, 39, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[105] Ibid., 40.
[106] Ibid., 39.
[107] Ibid., 40.
[108] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 74.
[109] Ibid., 90.
[110] Ibid., 77.
[111] Ibid., 80.
[112] Ibid., 78–82.
[113] Ibid., 83.

The Chancellor likewise investigated the possibility of demanding limited annexations from Congress Poland. On 6 December 1914, Bethmann Hollweg visited the army's eastern headquarters in Posen, where he asked Hindenburg to draft his own recommendations for revising the German-Russian border. In response, Hindenburg sent an annotated map to Berlin on 11 December 1914. The map itself no longer exists, but the accompanying notes suggest that he had recommended the seizure of at least the Bobr line, and probably the Bobr-Narew line, as Germany's minimal objectives in Congress Poland.[114]

However, even as Wahnschaffe and Bethmann Hollweg solicited expert advice on the ideal scope and governance of annexations, the Chancellery made sure to keep their options for Poland open. On 7 December, the day after requesting a border-proposal from Hindenburg, Bethmann Hollweg met with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, Prince Gottfried von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst. At this preliminary meeting, the Chancellor raised no objections to Vienna's claim on the preponderance of Congress Poland. However, he reserved the option to renegotiate Poland's fate in the future. He also boldly asserted Germany's right to claim hegemony over Congress Poland should this prove necessary.[115] With German forces stalled in the West, Bethmann Hollweg and Wahnschaffe scrambled to pin down a list of minimal territorial demands considered sufficient fortify Germany's border with Russia. They also rushed to determine how the empire could realistically govern the territories it might receive in a Russian peace settlement. However, Bethmann Hollweg's discussion with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador suggests that, the Chancellor still wanted the option of pursuing German suzerainty over Poland, if peace negotiations with Petrograd fell through.

Even as authorities in Berlin tentatively explored annexations, initial experiences of German officials in Congress Poland began to undermine the basic premises of nationalizing imperialism. Far from a hostile and unruly mob, German officials were noticing a well-organized and relatively cooperative population. Throughout the spring of 1915, reports began to trickle into the Chancellery and RAI from regions of Poland already occupied by the German Army. These portrayed local Poles as both capable and willing to work with, or at least tolerate, German troops. After touring occupied territory, the Minister for Agriculture submitted a report to State Secretary Delbrück on 2 January 1915, suggesting that Polish Russians appeared practically indifferent to the outcome of the war. They seemed most interested in avoiding their own embroilment in the conflict.[116] If not exactly "enthused" about the presence of German units in Russia, local Poles had behaved in an overall "friendly" manner towards them. Though not inclined to revolt against Russia, they were also not resisting German occupation.[117] On 22 June 1915, the Civil Administration for Occupied Poland forwarded a similar report from the German Police President of Łódź to State Secretary Delbrück.[118] The Police official complimented the local citizens' committee [*Bürgerkommittee*], which had taken control of the city after Russian officials evacuated.[119] He further reported that the committee and German occupation had effectively cooperated to retain calm and order in the city. The Police President generously complimented the German and Polish citizens of Łódź, whose self-organized "passionate communal administration", under the "most difficult circumstances", had effectively maintained the welfare and security of a metropolis of half a million people.[120] "The relationship between soldiers and citizenry", he added, "has remained completely peaceful".[121]

Such reports took the wind from the sails of nationalizing imperialists, contesting their central assumption that nationalist adversity between Germans and Poles was unbridgeable and

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[114] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 190; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 73.
[115] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 191.
[116] Clemens von Schorlemer-Lieser, "Report to State Secretary Clemens von Delbrück, 2 January 1915," January 2, 1915, 35, R1501/119779, BArch.
[117] Ibid., 36.
[118] Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Report on the Civilian Administration for Occupied Poland to the State Secretary of the RAI, 22 June 1915," June 22, 1915, 148, R1501/119779, BArch.
[119] Ibid., 151.
[120] Ibid., 152.
[121] Ibid.

politically destabilizing. These early reports suggested that, like Polish Prussians, Congress Poles were perhaps not so hostile to the German Empire as had been feared. Together, they hinted at the possibility that, with a more nuanced strategy of ethnic management, Berlin could channel Polish national politics to its advantage. State Secretary Delbrück understood the gravity of the Police President's report. He forwarded lengthy analysis of what was, ostensibly, a completely local issue in Łódź, to the Imperial Chancellor.[122]

Even as the Chancellery and RAI gathered suggestions on how to secure control over annexations according to a nationalizing model, these same agencies also actively probed political attitudes in Congress Poland to determine if such drastic models were even necessary. In March 1915, one RAI official commissioned a report on political sentiments in occupied Congress Poland from Wilhelm Feldman, a Polish publicist and known proponent of German-Polish reconciliation.[123] After a 14-day tour and discussions with Polish locals, Feldman presented his findings. His central contention was that the German Empire needed to reform its occupation to actively solicit Polish collaboration.[124] Feldman stated frankly that German policy must confront the reality of a "quite outspoken national-political ideals and powers" in Poland, and warned that Germany would inspire resistance or even revolution among its own Polish minority if German occupation policy violated the Polish nation.[125] Given Prussia's past *Ostmarkenpolitik*, and occupation's current lack of Polish-speaking personnel, Feldman admitted that most Congress Poles did not trust German motives.[126] He suspected that locals harbored sympathy for the Austro-Hungarians. Though he believed Polish Russians averse to Russian rule at heart, Feldman encouraged Berlin to offer a positive national program to consolidate this position, and bring the population into active collaboration with the Central Powers. Specifically, he recommended that the Central Powers announce their plans to incorporate Congress Poland into the Austro-Hungarian Empire and simultaneously begin distribution of weapons to Polish volunteers to support a "guerilla war" behind the Russian lines.[127] This last statement was too much for one German bureaucrat, who scribbled "Madness!" in the margin. Nonetheless, the Imperial Office of the Interior took Feldman's report seriously, and circulated it extensively.[128]

During the winter of 1914 and the spring of 1915 the Foreign Office confined its efforts on the Polish question to retaining Germany's diplomatic room for maneuver. On 21 December 1914, Undersecretary Zimmermann thus asked his Austro-Hungarian counterpart if Vienna would be comfortable with Germany claiming a strip of territory to the west of the Vistula.[129] Like every agency, the Foreign Office received a flood of memoranda and other literature from intellectuals and organizations promoting their own strategies for securing German control of Congress Poland. This included a small forest's worth of paper from vocal groups like the Pan-German League and *Ostmarkenverein*, calling for aggressive Germanization as the only sure way to secure Germany's hold on the frontier.[130] But it also included proposals from multinational imperialists who already called upon Wilhelmstraße to refrain from a hasty peace, and instead secure the entirety of Congress Poland by collaborating with Polish nationalists. Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster's June 1915 memo, for instance, insisted that Pole's could indeed be relied upon to collaborate with and defend the German Empire, and therefore encouraged Berlin to

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[122] Ibid., 153.
[123] Wilhelm Feldman, "Letter to the Undersecretary of the Imperial Office of the Interior, 29 April 1915," April 29, 1915, 62, R1501/119779, BArch.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Wilhelm Feldman, "Denkschrift über die politischen Verhältnisse im Königreich Polen," April 1915, 64, 77, R1501/119779, BArch.
[126] Ibid., 71–76.
[127] Ibid., 67–68, 70–71, 80–85.
[128] Clemens von Delbrück, "Letter to Wolfgang von Kries, 9 May 1915," May 9, 1915, 121, R1501/119779, BArch.
[129] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 78.
[130] Ostmarkenverein, "Report to the Foreign Office Regarding the Deportment of Prussian Poles, 26 November 1914," November 26, 1914, 2–30, R21655, PA AA; Otto Hoetzsch, "Memorandum on the Polish Question," December 1914, 31–74, R21655, PA AA.

establish a Polish satellite state under German Suzerainty.[131] The Foreign Office found the memo meritorious enough that they forwarded it to the RAI for further consideration.[132]

Debate over Germany's interests in Poland also simmered in the Prussian Interior Ministry during the stalemate in the East. Loebell intervened more energetically now, voicing his concerns about the "restoration of Poland", whether as an autonomous state or as part of an expanded Austria-Hungary.[133] On 4 November 1914, Loebell wrote to the Chancellery, warning Bethmann Hollweg not to create a "half-autonomous" state out of Poland. Rather than ruminate on Poles' cultural attributes or past loyalty, Loebell argued that the international structure of the region prohibited any multinational solution. One could not, he contended, "found dependent states from pieces of national groups".[134] Because a large Polish minority already inhabited Prussia, Loebell argued that erecting a Polish state across the border would invariably stoke secessionist movements in Prussia and expose Germany to Polish irredentism. Loebell bulwarked his argument by attaching a memorandum by Richard Witting, the former mayor of Posen. An independent or autonomous Poland, Witting warned, would invariably constitute a "Serbia of the North", a region constantly plotting to seize Prussian land, conspiring with Polish Prussians, and waiting to attack Germany in conjunction with her rivals.[135] Loebell also doubted his own ministry's ability to Germanize additional Polish populations. Substantial annexations, he warned, would therefore necessarily entail the expansion of Prussia's politically restive Polish minority, and the addition of reliably Polish seats in the Reichstag.[136] The Prussian Interior Minister therefore cautioned Bethmann Hollweg to seek only those minimal "border corrections" along the Polish frontier which were "urgently necessary" for purely military reasons.[137]

Loebell certainly doubted that Congress Poles could be relied upon to collaborate with the German Empire, but in November 1914, his proposed methods for managing any necessary border corrections remained fundamentally conservative. While Loebell supported the continued implementation of existing Prussian Germanization policies, he did not yet seize upon more aggressive schemes by nationalist groups for the rapid colonization of new territories. Indeed, Witting's memorandum, bearing Loebell's endorsement, dismissed radical nationalist proposals to reengineer local demography as "hardly discussable".[138] Sensing difficulty in managing additional Polish subjects, Loebell's instinct was to reduce the territorial scope of German ambitions, rather than target the population of the region.

As Loebell had already admitted in September 1914, debate over the proper scope and nature of German objectives in Poland divided the ranks of the Prussian Interior Ministry during this initial period of debate. In October 1914, Graf Robert von Keyserlingk, the district president of Königsberg, circulated a memo reaching precisely the opposite conclusions of his superior. A century of ruling over Polish subjects, Keyserlingk argued, had revealed that they were "animated by a powerful national feeling", so "steeled and united" that Germany could not hope to absorb them.[139] In short, Keyserlingk shared multinationalists' assesment of Poles as *Kulturfähig* and *Staatsfähig* in the sense that Germany could not hope to assimilate them. Creating an independent Polish state, including large swathes of territory in White Ruthenia, Keyserlingk concluded, represented the most effective means of clearing a strategic "protection zone" on Germany's eastern border.[140] With independence, Keyserlingk confidently asserted that

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[131] Fr. W. Foerster, "Letter, Professor Fr. W. Foerster to the Foreign Office," June 15, 1915, 164, R1501/119779, BArch.
[132] Ibid., 164–69.
[133] Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 4 November 1914," November 4, 1914, 161, R43/2476, BArch.
[134] Ibid., 163.
[135] Richard Witting, "Die Gestaltung der Dinge nach dem Kriege: Ostgrenze," November 1914, 169, R43/2476, BArch.
[136] Ibid., 168.
[137] von Loebell, "Letter to Bethmann Hollweg, 4 November 1914," 163.
[138] Witting, "Die Gestaltung der Dinge nach dem Kriege: Ostgrenze," 170.
[139] Robert von Keyserlingk, "Das Schicksal der Russischen Ostseeprovinzen im Interesse des Deutschen Reiches," October 1914, 172, R43/2476, BArch.
[140] Ibid., 173.

Polish nationalists would simply abandon their claims on Posen to concentrate their energies on constructing their new state and defending it from Russia. If the German Empire and an independent Poland eventually did clash, Keyserlingk considered a discrete Polish adversary preferable to a Russian colossus.[141] Though Loebell disagreed with Keyserlingk's conclusions, he deemed the proposal worthy of transmitting to the Chancellery for further consideration.

The German Army continued to hold complicated and conflicting opinions of Poles during this period. Stereotypes of Polish recruits already circulated in the Prussian army long before 1914, but few portrayed Poles as subversive or treacherous, much less dangerous.[142] Frictions in the barracks and on the parade ground more often resulted from linguistic misunderstandings than political ideology. Prussian officers often dismissed Polish recruits who had misunderstood barked German commands as lazy, stupid, or insubordinate. The stock caricature of a "Polack" in military humor, therefore, was a dull-witted and ill-disciplined soldier in an unkempt uniform.[143] These stereotypes still undermined unit cohesion, and contributed to disproportionately high suicide rates among units from Posen and Silesia.[144] However, Prussian officers were more likely to suspect Alsatian recruits of treachery.[145]

As the Polish question reopened during the war, some German military personnel did begin to question the loyalty of Polish Prussians. The Prussian army mobilized reservists into geographically organized units as a matter of expediency. Incidentally, this policy tended to concentrate Polish soldiers into the same units, and entire companies and squadrons were sometimes predominantly Polish-speaking.[146] Most of these units loyally served Berlin, but high concentrations of Poles could still magnify any latent nationalist sentiment that individual soldiers harbored. During the heavy fighting of 1915, the Prussian War Ministry received concerning reports of small-scale collective desertions of Polish soldiers.[147] Whether or not these desertions were in fact motivated by nationalist sentiment is usually impossible to tell. Some Polish prisoners in allied camps did replace Prussian insignia on uniforms with Polish colors, but not all. Even for these self-declared Polish nationalists, the patriotic cause might have been adopted as a convenient post-facto justification for their original choice to desert due to rough conditions at the front.[148] Regardless of cause, military reports from the spring of 1915 show serious concern in the ranks of the German army, especially regarding soldiers from the province of Posen.[149] Commanders reflexively blamed the desertion of Polish-speakers on political loyalty and feared that Poles were routinely entering service in the French army after their capture.[150] Throughout the German chain of command, officers worried that nationalist Polish Catholic clergy were actively dissuading Poles from fighting, and even encouraging their surrender.[151]

But despite these concerns, military opinion of Polish soldiers remained mixed. Although small-scale collective desertions did occur among units from Posen and West Prussia, the army received few, if any, reports of trouble from Polish troops conscripted from Masuria or Upper Silesia.[152] In 1915, Upper Silesian officials regularly praised the performance of local Polish soldiers in reports to superiors.[153] German officers frequently expressed satisfaction with their Polish men, and many allowed their enlisted men to converse in Polish while on duty, or even

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Dennis Showalter, "Comrades, Enemies, Victims: The Prussian / German Army and the Ostvölker," in *The Germans and the East*, ed. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 212–15.
[143] Ibid., 213.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 215.
[146] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1144.
[147] Ibid., 1150.
[148] Ibid., 1149–50.
[149] Ibid., 1148.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 1149.
[152] Ibid., 1150–51.
[153] Ibid., 1151.

encouraged them to sing Polish marching songs in addition to their German repertoire.[154] Faith in Polish loyalty indeed suffused the ranks of the German Army. In January 1915, Eisenhart-Rothe recorded a conversation with Hindenburg, in which the commander "repeatedly stressed" that "Poles in the field did their duty in an outstanding manner".[155]

Hindenburg's faith reflected a broader assumption of Polish loyalty, not treachery, in the Prussian Army, which manifested in its regulations for Polish troops. Indirect references exist to early 1915 directives to avoid deploying Polish soldiers on the Eastern Front, but the orders themselves have not survived. Beyond this, however, Poles were officially treated as normal soldiers. The Prussian army did not bar them from positions of responsibility or access to sensitive information, nor did they promulgate any special measures of censorship.[156] Poles were eligible, and did receive, promotions during the war.[157] Although German remained the language of command in the army, there was never any general rule banning the use of Polish in conversation. Indeed, Polish recruits often read the Prussian military code in translation after their enlistment.[158] If some officers suspected the political loyalties of Polish catholic clergy, the Prussian army still made sure to send Polish priests to their front to hear confessions.[159]

Germany's military leadership did not rigorously intervene in favor of any one solution to the Polish question during this period. When queried, Hindenburg recommended limited annexations in northern Congress Poland. One definite policy adopted by the Prussian War Ministry was to halt the emergence of an independent Polish military power before Germany and Austria-Hungary had settled the future status of Congress Poland. The War Ministry quickly decided not to equip the Polish legions or support any paramilitary organizations which they could not directly control.[160] Worried that anti-German elements within the legionary movement would assume control of the force, and given the Riflemens' embarrassing performance in August, the War Ministry concluded that supporting the Legion entailed too much risk for too little reward.[161] Officials in Berlin also worried that the Legion might spread Austrian influence in Congress Poland and prejudice negotiations in favor of an Austro-Polish solution. Because Berlin still wanted to retain flexibility in the status of Congress Poland, this was anathema. In November 1914, the War Ministry formally banned legionary recruitment in regions under German occupation.[162] The ban persisted until the end of the war.

Lacking any clear policy directive, the Germany's administration in occupied Russian-Poland focused its efforts on establishing order and security in the rear of the army, and otherwise avoiding any action that might commit the German Empire to a specific vision for the future of Congress Poland. Still, by February 1915, the daunting tasks facing the occupation, and the dearth of resources allocated to meet them, compelled the first civilian occupation chief, von Brandenstein, to seek the routine collaboration of local Poles. Brandenstein's reports back to the RAI routinely complained of the lack of police forces provisioned to secure Polish cities. Disconcertingly, armed banditry was already becoming a chronic security problem in the countryside.[163] Lacking manpower and denied reinforcements, Brandenstein opted form regulated Polish militias to overtake responsibility for local police matters.[164] Under Brandenstein's administration, the militias received special permission to equip themselves with melee weapons, though "unauthorized" persons found in possession of arms would still be subjected to drumhead

[154] Ibid., 1146–47.
[155] Ibid., 1147.
[156] Ibid., 1155.
[157] Ibid., 1145.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Wandel, "Kriegsministerium Memo on the Polish Legion," 3.
[161] Ibid., 4.
[162] Paul von Hindenburg, "Request to War Ministry for Opinion on Wandel Report, 8 December 1914," December 8, 1914, 14, R1501/119831, BArch.
[163] von Brandenstein, "Verwaltungsberichte des Zivilchefs in Russisch-Polen, 8 Februar 1915," February 8, 1915, 9, R1501/119758, BArch.
[164] Ibid., 9–10.

courts.[165] When professional German Gendarmes and police arrived to fortify these stopgap militias, they were deployed to the countryside in teams of two or four men. The civilian administration reported happily that Polish villages "exuberantly" greeted the arrival of occupation police, as it meant an abatement of murder, robbery, and skullduggery that had generally plagued the countryside.[166]

In the spring of 1915, occupation policing in Congress Poland thus began to shape German policy in two ways. First, the dearth of manpower required German occupation forces to rely on native collaboration, and develop a modicum of trust in their Polish subjects. Initially, this trust only extended far enough to allow carefully selected personnel to carry cudgels and sabers in an era of industrial warfare. Secondly, it indicated to German observers that, despite historically turbulent German-Polish relations, Congress Poles could still appreciate specific German services. Indeed it suggested that interethnic relations could be repaired with time. By July of 1915, the civil administration reported with satisfaction to Berlin that the growing burden of civil cases in local occupation courts indicated that the Polish population had come to trust the hastily erected German judicial system.[167]

Wolfgang von Kries replaced Brandenstein in the late spring of 1915 as the Chief of Civil Administration for occupied Russian Poland, a position that he would retain until 1917. He would become a central figure in shaping Polish policy during the war. Kries had served in the Prussian bureaucracy before the war, and had been elected as a conservative representative to the Prussian House of Representatives.[168] After taking his new Post, Kries also complained that the occupation lacked the necessary manpower to maintain security. Nonetheless, he found himself impressed by the prevailing order and lack of resistance offered by locals.[169]

Kries spent some time acquainting himself with political sentiment in Poland before adopting any definitive stance on the future status of Polish territory. However, he quickly developed a set of opinions that were incongruent with the rhetoric of radical German nationalists. Early in his tenure Kries concluded that Congress Poland simply did not offer much territory appropriate for German colonization. In April 1915, Kries already reported that much of Congress Poland was densely populated in both its cities and countryside, especially in comparison to the East Prussia.[170] To his view, Poland contained insufficient vacant land to support large-scale German settlement. He also had a high opinion of the occupied population. Though Kries dissolved several of the Polish citizens' committees which had sprung up in the wake of the Russian retreat, He noted in one report to Berlin that these rapidly assembled amateur municipal governments had ably tackled complex administrative and economic tasks under difficult conditions. They had, he believed, demonstrated Poles "great capacity for self-administration".[171] Whether he had developed this opinion before the war, or had developed an esteem for Polish Russians during his brief tenure, by the summer of 1915, the chief of administration for Germany's occupation of Russian Poland had flatly rejected the postulate that either Congress Poland, or its inhabitants, were uncivilized or primitive.

Kries's early observations on political sentiment in Congress Poland were similarly important. According to his May 1915 report to the RAI, Kries did not consider the population to favor anti-German Polish nationalism. So far as he understood it, political sentiment in occupied Poland seemed more unstable than anything. Kries singled out Russian loyalism, and not Polish nationalism, as the prevailing attitude of the population. Many under occupation, he reported,

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[165] von Brandenstein, "Verwaltungsberichte des Zivilchefs in Russisch-Polen, 24 Februar 1915," February 24, 1915, 33, R1501/119758, BArch.
[166] von Brandenstein, "Verwaltungsberichte des Zivilchefs in Russisch-Polen, 26 März 1915," March 26, 1915, 72, R1501/119758, BArch.
[167] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte Der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 20 Juli 1915," July 20, 1915, 31, PH30-II/8, BArch.
[168] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 75.
[169] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 25 April 1915," April 25, 1915, PH30-II/6, BArch.
[170] Ibid., 26.
[171] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte Der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 20 Juli 1915," 11.

wished for the restoration of Russian rule, even the "convinced Poles" and those "good Germans" living in Congress Poland.[172] This early impression proved decisive for Kries's policy-making in the summer of 1915. His early occupation policies and proposals for ruling Congress Polish space would derive from the assumption that state and imperial loyalties were ultimately more relevant than ethnic identity. That is, he would conclude Poles could be incorporated into the German Empire without posing a threat to its political stability or security of the state.

With Berlin contemplating limited annexations along the Polish border, some of Kries's earliest policies focused on establishing local conditions conducive to incorporation. Thus on 13 June 1915, Kries instructed the High Command of the 9th Army, at the time stationed in Łódź, that military authorities were not to assist German-speaking Russians attempting to migrate into the German Empire. According to his instructions:

> So long as the question of territorial gains from Russian Poland is not clarified, in the interest of a later Germanization of newly acquired regions, I harbor concerns about withdrawing German colonist-families from the flat lands, especially near the border.[173]

For the time being, therefore, Kries followed Berlin's lead and worked to keep his options open. Given the distinct possibility that Berlin might opt for border annexations and Germanization, the civil administration wanted to preserve an optimum demographic balance in the region. However, experience in the region was already prompting the Chief of Administration to question the fundamental assumption underpinning this form of ethnic management.

As the Chancellery and Foreign Office struggled to entice Petrograd to begin separate peace negotiations, Bethmann Hollweg assembled the Prussian *Staatsministerium* on 13 July 1915 to refine Germany's imperial strategy in the event that negotiations secured limited annexations along the German-Polish border. No records remain of the key meeting. According to Loebell's recollection of the meeting a year later, the assembled Prussian leaders agreed to seek the annexation of a border-strip of Polish territory behind the Warta and above the Narew rivers. He also referred to a decision to try to resettle Polish and Jewish residents of the territories eastward, either on their own volition or "without appreciable compulsion".[174] Geiss has described this meeting as the moment at which the German government definitively adopted a program of annexation and ethnic cleansing on the radical model of Friedrich von Schwerin.[175] There are three problems with this interpretation. First, Schwerin had counseled the annexation of territory behind the Bobr-Narew-Vistula-Warta line, much larger than the Narew-Warta lines mentioned by Loebell. Second, Loebell's halting references to demographic reengineering are considerably less commanding than Schwerin's March 1915 proposal for the outright expulsion of native Poles. Loebell's passing reference is, unfortunately, ambiguous, and might have referred to a number of policies, including: selling state domains in Congress Poland to entice voluntary migration, extending the activity of the Prussian settlement commission, and, finally, policies to expropriate or deport resident Poles. If the *Staatsministerium* did envision the latter policy, Loebell's qualification ("without appreciable compulsion") suggests they contemplated only limited resettlement. Finally, without records of the meeting, it is impossible to confirm that the conference reached any firm decisions on the management of annexed territory. Indeed, there are compelling reasons to believe that the conference produced only suggestions or provisional decisions. No participant list for the conference is extant, but as a Prussian *Staatsministerium* assembly, representatives of the Foreign Office and Imperial Office of the Interior were likely not in attendance. Indeed, if anybody but Loebell considered the results of the 13 July conference

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[172] Wolfgang von Kries, "Supplement to the Quarterly Administrative Report for German-Occupied Poland, 27 May 1915," May 27, 1915, 163, R1501/119758, BArch.
[173] Wolfgang von Kries, "Letter to High Command of the 9th Army, 13 June 1915," June 13, 1915, 77, R21574, PA AA.
[174] Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 1 February 1916," February 1, 1916, 113, R1501/119670, BArch.
[175] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 91–94.

binding for German policy, such 'decisions' were quickly contested, revised, and scrapped by key policy-makers working on the Polish question.

Wolfgang von Kries renounced nationalizing imperialism and, in his capacity as Chief of Administration for occupied-Poland, he implemented policies which obstructed Germanization. On 19 July, less than a week after the *Staatsministerium* conference, Kries submitted a memorandum which rejected nationalizing policies of ethnic management for governing Polish space. This memo, drafted on the request of Bethmann Hollweg, demonstrates the continuing intensity of the debate over imperial policy in Berlin.[176] If Kries attended the conference, which was entirely likely given his position as chief of the civilian administration of the occupied territory in question, his memorandum should be understood as a direct answer to the nationalizing programs promoted by figures like Loebell. If he was absent, his memo indicates either that Bethmann Hollweg had not circulated any decisions made on 13 July, or that no firm resolution had, in fact, been reached.

In his memorandum Kries opposed the creation of a Polish state, either as a buffer or under German auspices.[177] Unconvinced that Poles could be relied upon to collaborate with the Germany, Kries warned that the leaders of any "Polish protectorate" would be "covetous" of the Vistula estuary and would direct, provoke, and equip nationalist agitation to secure it for Poland.[178] Instead, assuming that Germany could negotiate peace with the Russian Empire, Kries agreed that Berlin should demand only limited, strategic annexations in Congress Poland.[179]

However, Kries's stated reasons for opposing Polish autonomy and endorsing annexations reveal important nuances in German discussions of ethnic management. While Kries believed, in July 1915, that a Polish *state* would be dangerous, he did not consider Polish nationalism itself to be either especially dangerous or obstinately opposed to German imperial interests. Kries's proposed annexations also promised to massively augment Prussia's native Polish population. He admitted outright that annexation would require Prussia to absorb 2.4 million new residents, only 10% of which spoke German.[180] Kries proposed no nationalizing measures to manage this population. He supported neither the expulsion of Poles, nor German colonization. He did not even mention linguistic Germanization. Indeed, Kries considered nationalizing policies unnecessary. German victory, he hoped, would confirm Berlin's possession of Polish territory and discourage Polish nationalist fantasies of secession.[181] More importantly, so long as Germany avoided seizing prominent Polish nationalist symbols, such as "spiritual" centers like Łódź, he believed that Poles would quickly accept the legitimacy of the Prussian state, especially because the rural population would profit from rising market prices for agricultural goods and land, as well as Prussian investment in infrastructure.[182]

In the summer of 1915, therefore, German decision-makers had not reached a broad consensus on imperial policy in Congress Poland. Kries believed that German imperial stability was compatible with the existence of a large population of Polish citizens, though only in the context of German statehood. Germany's chief of the *Zivilverwaltung* for occupied Poland demonstrated a deep faith in the power of imperial loyalties to surmount the political claims of national identity. He thought in terms of states. During the first months of his service, he had been more concerned about the population's fidelity to the Tsar than their potential interest in nationalist agitation. Now he again wagered the economic appeal of Prussian citizenship would again outweigh the mobilizing power of Polish nationalism. He opposed the creation of an autonomous Polish state precisely because he feared that Warsaw would quickly consolidate its

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[176] Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 19 July 1915," July 19, 1915, 4, R1501/119670, BArch.
[177] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 75.
[178] Wolfgang von Kries, "Denkschrift über den dauernden Erwerb der jetzt in deutscher Verwaltung stehenden russisch-polnischen Gebiete links der Weichsel für Deutschland-Preußen," July 19, 1915, 6, 18, R1501/119670, BArch.
[179] Ibid., 6.
[180] Ibid., 17.
[181] Ibid., 20.
[182] Ibid., 19.

own popular legitimacy, and thereafter wield Polish nationalism for its own ends. He did not yet see how Berlin could develop reliable levers of influence among leaders in Warsaw. In other words, Kries's 1915 annexationism actually indicated his own faith in the potential for German-Polish reconciliation, and the primacy of imperial loyalties.

During the spring and summer of 1915 Kries therefore sought to lay the foundations for a reconciliation of occupied Poles with the Prussian state, and to foster their loyalty as future citizens of the German Empire. Kries first proposed reopening Warsaw's storied university as a Polish institution of higher education, to demonstrate Germany's benevolence and commitment to preserving Polish national culture.[183] He similarly instructed his *Kreischef*s to begin rebuilding the long neglected Polish school system, though under careful surveillance.[184] Kries also began contemplating how to introduce instruction in German as a foreign language into Polish schools after the war.[185] Additionally, the occupation administration began to encourage local self-governance, installing city councils to oversee municipal budgets, public health and safety, infrastructure and social welfare.[186] The German *Zivilverwaltung* only selected mayors for municipal governments.[187] Conceived to shoulder some of the burden of administration, and blame for wartime shortcomings, municipal self-governance was also meant to signal the occupiers' intentions to collaborate with the Polish population.

These policies sought to curry favor with the Polish population and convince them that Berlin would repress neither Polish culture nor their political participation. They served Kries's preferred strategy of limited annexations premised on cultivating an *imperial* loyalty among the integrated Polish population. Benevolent education and political policies contained the added benefit of impressing positive memories of German administration among Poles who experienced the occupation, but would continue to live in the Russian Empire after the war. Generosity towards Polish nationalism would complicate Russian governance in the long term, establishing the German Empire as a viable patron of Polish interests. It would force Petrograd to either accept Polonized education and local self-governance, or poke the hornet's nest by rescinding these policies. Both options could challenge the stability of the autocratic regime.

Kries's policies would have been incomprehensible if he were considering a nationalizing strategy of ethnic management or if he believed that Berlin were leaning towards policies of expulsion or Germanization. It would have made little sense to lay the groundwork for a robust Polish primary and higher education system and to establish local political venues if policy-makers had resolved to displace annexed Poles and colonize the region. Institutionalizing Polish self-governance could only enable Poles to more effectively organize resistance to nationalizing imperial strategies. Conversely, aggressive policies of Germanization promised to instantly dissolve any good will that benevolent occupation policies hoped to congeal among locals. Ethnic cleansing, population exchanges, and rigid colonization would permanently enthrone the Russian Empire as the legitimate patron of the Polish nation, even if Petrograd rescinded self-governance and restored instruction in Russian as a second-language. German occupation policy in the summer of 1915 was already incompatible with an agenda of aggressive nationalization of Polish space. Even if, Germany's Imperial leadership had resolved to Germanize annexed Polish space, itself a doubtful proposition, their chief administrator of occupied Poland counseled against a nationalizing imperial model and initiated policies contrary to such ends.

For a brief moment from autumn 1914 through mid-summer 1915, imperial leaders seriously considered nationalizing paradigms of ethnic management to secure stable control over limited territorial gains in Poland. However, official support for this paradigm of ethnic management was strained and beleaguered from the beginning. The growing recognition that Poles could be loyal to empires and that Polish national interests could be compatible with German imperial interests had done severe violence to the central assumptions of nationalizing

[183] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 158.
[184] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 25 April 1915," 41.
[185] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte Der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 20 Juli 1915," 59.
[186] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 109.
[187] Ibid., 108.

imperialism. Thus, even as generals sketched new borders along the Bobr, the Narew, and sometimes the Warta, by July of 1915, prominent voices were already counseling against aggressive programs of Germanization, colonization, and expulsion, warning that these would only inspire the lasting resistance and animosity of the Polish nationalist movement, and equip Germany's rivals with a ready tool to mobilize Poles against Berlin. Far better, the chief of the civilian administration of Occupied Poland suggested, to integrate Poles into the German state, and attempt to foster their permanent loyalty to the empire as a more effective guarantor of Polish culture than Petrograd. Even within the debate over how to govern annexations, multinationalist assumptions of ethnic management were gaining ground.

The Foundation of The Government General of Warsaw and the Renewed Appeal of Multinational Imperialism, Autumn 1915

In the summer of 1915 the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive once again fundamentally altered German imperial priorities in Congress Poland. In April 1915 German units had begun advancing on the Northern front to finally secure East Prussian from Russian invasion. The decisive stroke fell in the south, near Kraków. There General August von Mackensen launched what was initially conceived as a limited offensive by the German Eleventh Army and Austro-Hungarian Fourth Army to relieve pressure on Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia. The offensive broke through Russian lines on the Gorlice-Tarnów front and threatened to roll up the Russian front from its Southern flank. The Russian army began a limited retreat in response, which rapidly deteriorated into a general route under constant German pressure. The offensive was an astounding strategic success for the Central Powers, and yielded a rapid general advance. German cavalry finally entered Warsaw on 5 August 1915. When bad weather finally halted the advance of the Central Powers in October, German forces had seized Mitau in the North reached the gates of Riga. Units had crossed the Bug and taken Pinsk in the center of the line, occupying the entirety of Congress Poland in the process.

With the seizure of Congress Poland, it became increasingly realistic for German policy-makers to imagine permanently dislodging the entire territory from the Russian Empire, and attaching it to one or both of the Central Powers. Simultaneously, the Tsar's repeated rejection of Berlin's peace feelers made it apparent that a separate peace would not be immediately forthcoming.[188] Strategically, the eastern frontier of Congress Poland offered a much more favorable defensive line than any prospective border-strip. The possibility of rapid peace with Russia had been one of the primary motives for limiting German demands in Congress Poland. By extension, this had also sustained official support for nationalizing paradigms of ethnic management. Nationalizing imperialism had promised to permanently secure discrete territory from Polish national mobilization. However, the model was ill-suited for managing large territories, much less the entirety of Congress Poland. Nobody believed there were enough Germans willing to settle the region to meaningfully affect its demographic balance. Proposals to rule through raw force or mass-expulsions had been contentious enough when related to a discrete border-strip. These were not seriously considered for managing all of Congress Poland. Some policy-makers continued to advocate only annexing and Germanizing limited amounts of Polish territory, but given the statistical obstacles to colonization, moral objections to Germanization and expulsions, and the propensity of these actions to provoke Polish nationalist ire, nationalizing imperialism lost much of its appeal after the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive. When the prospect of a separate peace waned, German policy-makers often ceased exploring how to rule discrete annexations along the German-Polish border, and instead began to ponder how to seize all of Congress Poland, and best secure the German-Empire's interests in the region.

The German Empire seized Congress Poland without any clear plan for what to do with it.[189] But it did not craft its subsequent Polish policy from whole cloth. Rather, policy-making in the *Reichsleitung*, military, occupation authority, and Prussian government all continued the same debates over how to optimally balance Germany's strategic objectives in Congress Poland

[188] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 198.
[189] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 25.

and avoid inciting any Polish nationalist resistance that might subvert their aims. Multinational imperialism had already attracted support among policy-makers in the Chancellery, Foreign Office, and *Zentralstelle* even before the offensive. The successful mobilization of Polish conscripts, the placidity of the Prussian *Ostmark*, and the lack of guerilla resistance offered by Polish Russians all suggested to imperial observers that, far from being intrinsically hostile to the German Empire, Poles could actually be relied upon to defend the German state under certain conditions. High-profile Multinationalist intellectuals continued to articulate a convincing case that an autonomous Polish state under German leadership would most effectively shorten the effective German frontier with Russia, bulwark its military forces, and improve its strategic position. Magnified by sympathetic Polish voices, they made a strong case that such a state would accept German leadership as a means of defending its new autonomy. Multinational imperialism resonated with Germany's of federal constitutional experience, and therefore made intuitive sense to many in Berlin. Even when stalemate on the Eastern Front had made Polish statehood seem unlikely, ardent multinationalists like Paul Rohrbach, had remained influential in the government, and counseled delaying peace until the Russian Empire had been shattered.

Thus, when all of Congress Poland fell under the occupation of the Central Powers in 1915, it did not prompt a confused search for new solutions among German policy-makers. It unleashed a surge of support for the creation of a German-Polish union, represented by an influential multinationalist faction within almost every major component of the German imperial government. After August 1915, debate over how to organize Congress Poland mainly focused on two options: an Austro-Polish solution with limited German annexations, or the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German leadership, whether as part of Mitteleuropa, under German suzerainty, or as a Federal Kingdom of the German Empire.

Germany's occupation in Congress Poland was organized with three fundamental objectives. It was to a) maintain order and secure the rear for Germany's army still fighting on the Eastern front, b) retain Berlin's freedom of maneuver in the Polish question, and c) maintain friendly relations with the occupied population. Germany split responsibility for the occupation with Austria-Hungary. Vienna established the Government General of Lublin (*Generalgouvernement Lublin* or GGL) in the predominantly rural territory of southeast Congress Poland. It administered a population of roughly 3.5 million. The substantially larger German Government General of Warsaw (*Generalgouvernement Warschau* or GGW) governed the much more urbanized and industrialized North and West of Congress Poland, and ruled over 6 million Poles.[190] Falkenhayn had pressed for the creation of a distinct occupation government in part to block the incorporation of the territory into Ober Ost, and thereby prevent the further accrual of influence by Hindenburg and Ludendorff.[191] The move of course annoyed supporters and subordinates of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, and friction between the GGW and Ober Ost would emerge periodically in the coming months.[192] But for the time being, the two occupations did not work at cross-purposes to one another.

Supreme executive authority for the occupation was vested in a military Governor-General, and but administration remained under the control of the civilian chief administrator, Wolfgang von Kries. The GGW was divided into eleven military governments. Each military governor had authority over local police and occupying troops. 41 battalions in all were garrisoned in the GGW. 30 *Kreise*, headed by civilian district chiefs (*Kreischefs*) handled day-to-day administration.[193] The GGW also coordinated security, counter-intelligence operations, and political policing through the *Zentralpolizeistelle Warschau*, which in turn dispatched representatives to each of the eleven military governments.[194]

The GGW was a distinctly imperial, and not a Prussian, occupation. The Federal

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[190] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 30–32.
[191] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 30.
[192] Max Hoffmann, *War Diaries: And Other Papers*, trans. Eric Sutton, vol. 1 (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2013), entry for 25 August 1915.
[193] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 31; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 31.
[194] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to the Deputy Chancellor, 23 October 1915," October 23, 1915, 4, R1501/119759, BArch.

Kingdoms proved keenly interested in the development of the occupation. As the GGW was established in late August, the royal governments of Saxony and Bavaria scrambled to install their own representatives in the highest echelons of its administration.[195] The Saxon General, Felix Barth, was confirmed as military governor of Łódź, and a Saxon Councilor was installed on the staff of the central administration in Warsaw.[196] Count Hugo von Lerchenfeld-Köfering, a Bavarian State Councillor, royal representative to Berlin, representative of Bavaria in the Bundesrat, and most recently deputy to the Police President in Łódź, was promoted to state commissioner of the GGW and given responsibility for coordinating the various police presidia with the Central Police Office in Warsaw.[197] Their early intervention for influence in the GGW suggests that the federal kingdoms also imagined that Poland's fate would affect their dynastic interests, the federal structure of the empire, or both. Neither Munich or Dresden would have been enthused about border annexations further consolidating Prussia's already disproportionate position in the empire. Moreover, the Catholic Wittelsbach and Wettin dynasties were both viable candidates for a Polish throne, should one become available. The federal kingdom's personnel preferences suggest they too were beginning to favor the establishment of a autonomous Kingdom of Poland, rather than the expansion of Prussia.

For the time being, however, Berlin mandated that the GGW foster friendly relations with the population, but otherwise not prejudice any particular settlement to the Polish question. On 4 August, Falkenhayn requested clarification from the Foreign Office as to what Germany aimed for in Congress Poland, as this might impact occupation policy.[198] He was told that nothing had been decided and the issue was referred to the Chancellor.[199] Bethmann Hollweg hastily responded that the Chancellery thus far intended to annex territory along the Polish border, but not so much that it might offend Polish national sentiment as a 'Fourth Partition'.[200] However, the Chancellor also identified four potential plans for Congress Poland: a separate peace with minor border modifications, the annexation of Congress Poland to Austria-Hungary or an autonomous Polish state linked by "military convention" to either Germany or Austria-Hungary.[201] Though officially undecided, the Chancellor made it very clear that he preferred either an Austro-Polish or German-Polish solution. He insisted that, no matter what, German aims must above all avoid making enemies of Polish nationalists, as this would enable Russia to stoke irredentism in Prussia.[202] For now the occupation would have to avoid any policies which might suggest Germanization or "irritate" Polish observers.[203] Though officially still open to the prospect of annexations, Bethmann Hollweg's logic confirms that he was abandoning nationalizing models of ethnic management, as these might equip rivals with a powerful weapon against Germany in the future. The Chancellor now presumed that Germany would continue to have a Polish population after the war. Thus his suggestion that friendly occupation policy would be the best means to foster loyal Poles as a bulwark against the "Slavic flood", even if Russia retained control of Congress Poland after the war.[204] A copy of the Chancellor's explanation was distributed to the GGW as a basic set of policy parameters.[205] The Government General of

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[195] Große Hauptquartier (von Leuckert), "Telegram to Colonel von Marschall, 28 August 1915," August 28, 1915, 249, PH1/6, BArch; Bavarian Military Plenipotentiary, "Telegram to Colonel von Marschall, 29 August 1915," August 29, 1915, 250, PH1/6, BArch.

[196] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 10 Januar 1916," January 10, 1916, 73, PH30-II/10, BArch.

[197] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte Der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 20 Juli 1915," 3; von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht, 10 Januar 1916," 73.

[198] Karl Georg von Treutler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 4 August 1915," August 4, 1915, 195, R21655, PA AA.

[199] Ibid., 196.

[200] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 4 August 1915," August 4, 1915, 192, R21655, PA AA.

[201] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Erich von Falkenhayn Regarding Plans for Poland," August 4, 1915, 13, N30/19, BArch.

[202] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 4 August 1915," 193.

[203] Ibid.

[204] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Erich von Falkenhayn Regarding Plans for Poland," 14.

[205] Ibid., 13.

Warsaw was therefore established with orders to maintain friendly and collaborative relations with resident Poles, with the understanding that the region might be incorporated into the German imperial structure as an autonomous state.

Following the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive factions throughout the imperial government and military now began to press for the creation of a German-Polish union. Historians have generally portrayed the German army as a stubborn bastion of annexationism and particularly disposed to advocate nationalizing models of imperialism. With an institutional culture purported to favor irrational violence, Germany's military leadership has generally been accused of aping Pan-German proposals for organizing Poland and Eastern Europe.[206] In reality, German officers were socialized in the same contested national discourse which had produced both the nationalizing-imperialism of the Pan-German League, and the multinational imperialism of Left Liberals, Roman Catholics, and moderate conservatives. They wrestled with the same questions of how to reconcile diversity and expansion with the demands of unity and security. Military proposals for securing objectives in Congress Poland therefore replicated this fundamental split in German imperial discourse. Some commanders believed that Poles could not be trusted to collaborate with the German Empire. But the German army also produced some of the strongest and most insistent advocates of multinational imperialism.

Military opinion of Polish conscripts remained mixed in this period. The successful mobilization of Polish Prussians the previous year had left an enduring impression within the army. However, commanders sometimes complained of finding propaganda for Polish independence among their soldiers' belongings.[207] Throughout 1915, the Prussian War Ministry noted lagging standards of discipline and higher rates of desertion in units with high concentrations of Polish-speakers. In November 1915 the War Ministry issued new deployment policies. Newly mustered Poles were transferred to the Western Front and parceled across several predominantly German units to avoid units becoming nationalist hothouses.[208] By placing small groups of Poles into larger German units where, social pressure encouraged unit loyalty, rather than amplifying subversive nationalist politics.[209] Desertions by Polish-speakers declined after 1915. Entente prisoner statistics show that only 4.9% of prisoners were Polish, despite representing 6% of the German Army.[210]

The brief uptick in Polish desertions in 1915 did not apparently spoil army commanders' initially positive impressions of Polish loyalism. Instead army leaders began to throw their weight behind a multinational model of imperialism in Poland and advocate the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty as the best means to secure both Germany and Poland from the Russian Empire. Army Chief of Staff Erich von Falkenhayn first suggested exploring the possibility of a German-Polish union soon after the formal creation of the GGW. He had already mentioned the idea as one of several possibilities in his 4 August note to Bethmann Hollweg. Falkenhayn and the Kaiser discussed the Polish question informally on 31 August, at which point Falkenhayn suggested the creation of a new Kingdom of Poland with "limited autonomy under the control of us and Austria".[211] The Kaiser reportedly favored the idea. He first wanted to confirm that political sentiment in Congress Poland would tolerate the leadership of the Central Powers and support a war against the Russian Empire before committing to any policies.[212] Nonetheless, the Kaiser felt strongly enough at this juncture that he ordered Treutler to inform the Foreign Office of the conversation.[213]

Falkenhayn was motivated at least in part by the possibility of recruiting Polish fighters for the current war effort. He said as much in an 8 September 1915 letter to Bethmann Hollweg.

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[206] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 201.
[207] Deputy Commanding General of the II Army Corps, "Letter to the Press Department of the Prussian War Ministry, 30 November 1915," November 30, 1915, 174, R21575, PA AA.
[208] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland," 1156.
[209] Ibid., 1158.
[210] Ibid., 1159.
[211] Karl Georg von Treutler, "Letter to the Foreign Office, 31 August 1915," August 31, 1915, 205, R21655, PA AA.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 206.

Recent statements by the Tsar, he wrote, had made clear that a separate peace was not to be expected in the near future.[214] To push for military victory the following year, Falkenhayn sought new wells of both industrial and military manpower.[215] He therefore pressed the Chancellor to immediately clarify the future of Congress Poland. A favorable solution, he hoped, would entice Polish nationalists to join the war effort, potentially enabling the German army to recruit Polish soldiers for the spring of 1916.[216] But Bethmann Hollweg threw cold water on this short-term aim, pointing out that drafting Russian subjects would contravene international law.[217] Recruitment of volunteer legions offered a legal alternative, but Bethmann Hollweg rejected this option as well, explaining that reports from Congress Poland had revealed Polish Russians to be either too politically apathetic to fight for the national cause, or too cognizant that they would be liable for treason if they joined the Central Powers.[218] The paltry number of Poles they could hope to recruit from the educated classes, the Chancellor concluded, would not be worth the trouble.[219] Bethmann Hollweg therefore confirmed his decision to wait until the situation had been further clarified.[220]

In the autumn of 1915 The Deputy General Staff articulated a more detailed multinationalist vision for extending German influence over Congress Poland. During the war, the General Staff delegated a number of important matters and functions to the Deputy General Staff in Berlin, while the OHL directed the field army from Supreme Headquarters. The Deputy General Staff handled, among other responsibilities, studies of complex operations, intelligence and counter-intelligence, political matters, and coordination with the Foreign Office. The Deputy General Staff and its chief, Helmuth von Moltke, followed Polish policy closely, and were often quite generous to the idea of Polish collaboration.[221] Moltke had been reassigned as Chief of the General Staff in 1914, after his nervous breakdown on the Western Front had ended his tenure as Chief of the General Staff. On 25 January 1915, Moltke contacted the RAI to intervene in the question of collaboration with Polish paramilitaries. Unlike some voices in the Foreign Office and Chancellery who worried that the Legionary movement could not be adequately controlled by Berlin, Moltke believed that Germany could trust the Polish volunteers. "My standpoint" he wrote, "is that one can already trust people, like the Polish legionnaires, who are surely to be hanged if they fall into Russian hands".[222] He therefore believed that the German Empire should support the Polish Legions, and encourage their recruitment efforts in German-occupied Poland.[223] By January of 1915, the Chief of the Deputy General Staff already considered Poles trustworthy, and argued that their own interest in combatting the Russian Empire made them valuable potential allies.

By autumn, this had apparently become the institutional position in the Deputy General Staff. On 6 October 1915, the Newspaper Office of the Deputy General Staff drafted and circulated a memorandum entitled "Poland: Findings of Press-Observation and Conclusions".[224] As Chief, Moltke might have had had some input or direction on the document. He certainly circulated it under his imprimatur. The document laid out a clear vision for incorporating Poland into a German-led multinational imperial structure. It reflected many of the same views and

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[214] Erich von Falkenhayn, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 8 September 1915," September 8, 1915, 207, R21655, PA AA.
[215] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 219.
[216] von Falkenhayn, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 8 September 1915," 207.
[217] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 16 September 1915," September 16, 1915, 258, R 21655, PA AA.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Karl Georg von Treutler, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 16 September 1915," September 16, 1915, 260, R21655, PA AA.
[221] Helmuth von Moltke, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 8 March 1916," March 8, 1916, 72, R1501/119790, BArch.
[222] Helmuth von Moltke, "Letter to Ministerialdirektor of the Imperial Office of the Interior, 25 January 1915," January 25, 1915, 5, R1501/119790, BArch.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Stellvertretender Generalstab, Zeitungstelle, "Polen: Ergebnisse der Pressabeobachtung und Schlussfolgerungen (abgeschlossen am 30. 9.15)," September 30, 1915, 87, N30/34, BArch.

assumptions of Polish nationhood already articulated by multinationalist intellectuals. Notably, the author emphasized Pole's sense of history and a traditional place in the occidental community, and portrayed Poland as an essentially civilized nation.[225] It followed that Polish populations would be practically impossible to Germanize and difficult to rule by force.

> The subjugation of Poland under German rule would permanently sustain political ferment in the country, breed an irredenta, and open the door to secret infiltration on the Part of Russia and the Western Powers.[226]

The German Empire, in short, could not hope to forge a reliable and secure border in the east by annexing Polish territory. The same danger of Polish irredentism, the memorandum continued, rendered the integration of Poland into Austria-Hungary, or its establishment as an independent state, strategically untenable for the German Empire.[227]

However, the staff officers responsible for interpreting Polish conditions insisted that Polish nationalism could be manipulated. They respected the integrative power of Polish nationalism, and considered agitators influential enough to mobilize public opinion and marshal resistance if Polish culture or interests were threatened. However, observation of occupied-Poland had already led them to conclude that most Poles, including the peasantry and much of the nobility, were largely uninterested in nationalist politics. "The urge to participate in political life", they summarized, was restricted to a small circle of urban elites.[228] Moreover, the memorandum noted that the political landscape in Congress Poland remained fractured, united around only one stable assumption: the desire for the elevation of the Polish nation from its current conditions of political impotence.[229] Though they admitted that the Poles had no "love for Prussian-Germany", they hoped that most Polish disdain for the Central Powers had been either engineered, or even greatly inflated, by Tsarist propaganda and censorship practices.[230] Potentially more powerful, they believed, was popular hostility in Congress Poland towards the Russian Empire, based on Petrograd's systematic discrimination and harassment of Roman Catholicism. That is, the German staff officers argued that confessional sentiment could be "stronger than the political or national" feeling of the Poles.[231]

They believed that Germany could win over Polish nationalists to a pro-German position with relative ease, both by positioning Berlin as a patron of Catholic rights, and by adopting conciliatory ethnic policies, especially the abolition of discriminatory Prussian laws. The authors noted that, in the period of Chancellor Leo von Caprivi's conciliatory policies toward Poles, "the Russians [censors] had all of their hands full, striking out all of the praise directed towards the German Kaiser and German government" which appeared in Polish newspapers.[232] The memorandum further prescribed focusing German efforts on winning over those Polish political, social, and cultural elites, already disposed to see the German Empire in a positive light.[233]

> But if one turned to the discerning men of all classes of society, namely on those who aimed high economically or treasure spiritual culture, the result was always the admission that the Germans want to bring them salvation from the West out of a desolate position that hinders normal spiritual and economic development.[234]

By reforming German domestic politics, institutionalizing Polish self-governance, and painting

[225] Ibid., 101.
[226] Ibid., 105.
[227] Ibid., 103–6.
[228] Ibid., 91, 99.
[229] Ibid., 92, 99.
[230] Ibid., 96.
[231] Ibid., 101.
[232] Ibid., 96.
[233] Ibid., 92.
[234] Ibid., 96.

Germany as a defender of Latin Christendom, the staff officers believed that Berlin could win the confidence and loyalty of Polish national elites, who would in turn lead the Polish masses into reliable collaboration with the German Empire.

The memorandum strongly endorsed the formation of a German-Polish union. The staff officer concretely prescribed the transformation of Congress Poland into a Polish state, in possession of full administrative and political autonomy and its own dynastic monarchy. Its sovereignty would only be limited in that "Germany must take over leadership of the foreign affairs and military command".[235] He wrote of the plan as a comprehensive "compromise [*Ausgleich*]· of German and Polish interests". He considered the "creation of a stately German-Polish subunit" the most effective way to consolidate Germany's position in the East while still being able to "satisfy the mass of the reasonable Polish population".[236] Polish nationalists, he argued, would accept German suzerainty because they would recognize the "fundamental advantage of a western, state-oriented relationship" with Germany over the "arbitrary" and "dominating" rule of the Russian Empire, which "crippled" their national development.[237] More importantly, Polish nationalists would depend upon the might of German arms to seize their national autonomy, and defend it from future Russian designs.[238]

So confident was the staff officer that a Polish satellite would fortify, and not threaten, German security in the East, that he recommended making the Polish state as powerful as possible. Specifically, the memorandum called for the Eastward expansion of the Kingdom of Poland, annexing as much White Ruthenian territory to Poland as peace negotiations would allow. The author even broke with *OberOst* occupation policy and suggested uniting Russia's Baltic governorates with the Kingdom of Poland in an autonomous federal structure.[239] Combining a "Baltic state with the Polish" as a "subunit in federation with Germany" would surely fortify the German "position of power in the East".[240]

By the autumn of 1915 therefore, high-ranking officers in the Deputy General Staff considered Poles reliable enough that they articulated a grandiose vision of multinational empire in Eastern Europe, premised upon institutionalizing Polish political and cultural power, and permanently binding it in a quasi-federal relationship to the Empire. Indeed, the vision of the Deputy General Staff went further, seeing multinational imperialism as the general template for stabilizing German rule in the East. Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and White Ruthenians could all be thusly integrated. The memorandum more than likely carried Moltke's approval, but unlike his earlier petition, it contained no mention of recruiting Polish volunteers for the present war. It was a distinctly long-term vision of imperial restructuring, not a ploy for cannon-fodder. The Deputy General Staff memorandum also demonstrates the depth of penetration of multinationalist paradigms of ethnic management within the German Army. Multinationalism was not an emergency measure for recruitment, nor a marginal and idiosyncratic scheme of isolated generals like Falkenhayn, but rather an institutionally credible model of empire.

The Prussian War Ministry, under the direction of Adolf Wild von Hohenborn, was also increasingly receptive to multinational imperialism as a model for governing Polish space. On 25 October, the War Minister's Chief of Staff forwarded a packet of memoranda to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, each of which either doubted the advisability of annexations and nationalization, or overtly endorsed the creation of a Polish state under German suzerainty.[241] The first of these memos recognized the German Empire's pressing need to acquire "vast tracts of land on the Eastern Front", and thereby prevent a "repetition" of Britain's "starvation-plan".[242]

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[235] Ibid., 106.

· Perhaps suggestively recalling the 1867 Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*.

[236] Stellvertretender Generalstab, Zeitungstelle, "Polen: Ergebnisse der Pressabeobachtung," 106–8.

[237] Ibid., 96.

[238] Ibid., 99.

[239] Ibid., 106, 113.

[240] Ibid., 107.

[241] Kriegsministerium (Schleüch), "Letter to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 25 October 1915," October 25, 1915, 320, R21574, PA AA.

[242] Ehlers, "Neue Siedlungsgebiete," October 1915, 321, R21574, PA AA.

However, noting that Germans' "renowned good-nature and love of justice" would prevent them from driving current residents from their homes, the author argued that only thinly-populated regions could be considered for Germany's purposes. Poland, it concluded, had few of these.[243] Like many in the government, the author ultimately supported the annexation of Suwałki and along the Bobr-Narew line, as the effected region was marshy and sparsely settled.[244] As for the rest of Congress Poland, the author concluded that Germany's only plausible option was to create a "more or less dependent Kingdom of Poland".[245]

The second memorandum similarly contemplated how to break Germany's dependence upon food imports by utilizing the Baltics and Congress Poland. This memo insisted that there was no compelling economic reason to nationalize these spaces or expel their inhabitants. Germany could develop nutritional self-sufficiency without forcing Eastern Europeans from their land. What mattered was the German Empire's reliable access to food produced there.[246] So long as these regions were integrated into Germany's economy, and reliably under Berlin's control, German speakers didn't actually need to till the fields. Seeing no urgent value in annexation, the author ultimately counseled the "complete or partial incorporation of Russian Poland and the Baltic provinces into the German Confederation.[247]

This high-level relay of memoranda from the War Ministry to the Foreign Office signaled two things. First, insofar as the War Ministry was thinking about annexations, discussion had turned away from securing this territory via ethnic cleansings. Moreover, Germanization no longer seems to have been a priority. The War Ministry did not apparently regard Polish nationalism as an inherent threat to Germany. Secondly, the War Ministry was also beginning to actively consider the creation of autonomous states bound to Germany. Relationships of suzerainty were increasingly seen as sufficient to achieve German objectives. The War Ministry had begun to contemplate Poland as a potentially reliable component of the German Empire.

Even Erich Ludendorff supported the incorporation of an autonomous Polish state into a German-Polish union, first in his capacity as the Chief of Staff of Ober Ost, and then as Quartermaster General of the OHL. Ludendorff has become synonymous with unrepentant annexationism, and has often been portrayed in historiography as both sympathetic to the *Ostmarkenverein* and deeply suspicious of Polish intentions.[248] Ludendorff himself encouraged this portrait, painting himself as the beleaguered champion of the German *Volk* in his postwar memoirs.[249] Certainly Ludendorff's role in organizing the exploitative *OberOst* occupation has led credence to this view. He supported vast annexations along the Baltic coast and oversaw the introduction of policies to Germanize the populations of Courland, Kovno, and Grodno.[250] Those historians who have recognized Ludendorff's support for the creation of a Polish State under German suzerainty, have also generally downplayed his support for multinationalism as an imperial model, arguing instead that he reluctantly set-aside his deep hatred of Poles because he believed the German Empire desperately needed manpower that Poland might provide.[251] In reality, Ludendorff had, by late 1915, developed a complex understand of the Eastern European ethno-political landscape, and, had begun to tailor his preferred imperial strategies to the

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[243] Ibid., 321–22.
[244] Ibid., 322.
[245] Ibid., 322–23.
[246] Kohnke, "Memorandum on War Aims in Russian Poland and the Baltic Provinces," September 1915, 329–30, R21574, PA AA.
[247] Ibid., 334.
[248] Werner Conze, "Nationalstaat oder Mitteleuropa: Die Deutsches Reichs und die Nationalitätenfragen Ostmitteleuropas im ersten Weltkrieg," in *Deutschland und Europa. historische Studien zur Völker- und Staatenordnung des Abendlandes* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1951), 219; Robert L Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space: Forced Population Transfer Fantasies during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014), 113.
[249] Erich Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919).
[250] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*.
[251] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 74.

perceived political sophistication of affected societies.

As Chief of Staff for the Supreme Command in the East, Ludendorff continued to support annexations at strategic points along the German-Polish border. However the initial scale of these proposed annexations has often been overstated.[·] On 27 August 1915, Ludendorff wrote to Undersecretary Zimmermann in the Foreign Office to contest the territorial borders of the emerging GGW. Because it must eventually annex the Narew-line along Ostrołęka-Łomża-Osowiec, he explained, Germany should not even bother giving Łomża to the GGW. The northwestern governorate of Congress Poland, he argued, should instead be integrated into Ober Ost.[252] The note is more significant for what it does not say, than what it does. While Ludendorff vocally asserted the necessity of northern annexations, he did not suggest withholding any territory along the western rim of Congress Polnad from the GGW's jurisdiction. Western lands were apparently not part of his annexationist plans in August 1915. Furthermore, his note betrayed the military's recognition that the GGW administration signified that Congress Poland had a special status, that the area under its jurisdiction would not be annexed. Indeed Ludendorff seemed to understand that GGW status might somehow inhibit future annexation.

Two months later, Ludendorff's thinking had evolved. On 20 October 1915, Ludendorff sent a scribbled note to Zimmermann.[253] The more he considered the matter, Ludendorff confessed, the less willing he was to accept either Austria-Hungary's possession of Congress Poland, or its return to the Russian Empire.[254] Germanizing the entirety of Congress Poland was entertained by nobody, and thus not mentioned. Lacking better alternatives, Ludendorff suggested that the creation of a "more-or-less" autonomous Polish state under German "suzerainty [*Oberhoheit*]" constituted the best strategic option for the German Empire.[255] He proposed supporting Austro-Hungarian claims in Serbia in exchange for their divestment from Congress Poland.

Nowhere in this note did Ludendorff propose, nor even mention, recruiting Polish soldiers for the present war. Moreover, he based his endorsement of a German-Polish union not upon the promise of Polish divisions, whether in the short-term or the distant future. Rather, he justified his position based on the exhaustion of all other viable models for securing German interests in Congress Poland. Based upon the experience of mobilization and perceptions of the political climate in Poland thus far, Ludendorff apparently believed it plausible that an autonomous Polish state would loyally defend and reliably collaborate with its German suzerain. His endorsement signaled that Ludendorff did not consider German-Polish national strife to be insurmountable. By contrast, as of late 1915 he apparently believed that the annexation of a massive border-strip, secured via colonization or ethnic cleansing represented a comparatively disadvantageous strategic model, likely to stir enduring ethnic conflict for minor strategic gains.

All this is not to paint a rosy picture of imperialism in the German army. Indeed the army replicated the same debate between proponents of nationalizing and multinational imperialism that smoldered in throughout imperial discourse. Colonel Max Hoffmann, a staff officer who had brilliantly served Ludendorff and Hindenburg on several campaigns on the Eastern Front, doubted that autonomous national states could be relied upon to serve Berlin's interests, and expressed concerns over the feasibility of a multinational Empire. In the autumn of 1915, Hoffmann considered Congress Poland more burdensome than promising, a "distinctly troublesome point", that Germany could not hope to control, should not hand over to Vienna, and dare not release to its own devices.[256] Generally pessimistic about the Polish question, Hoffmann

[·] Discussions generally conflate his war aims agenda in 1915 with his later, much more extensive, demands for annexations in Poland.

[252] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Undersecretary Arthur Zimmermann, 27 August 1915," August 27, 1915, 201, R21655, PA AA.

[253] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Undersecretary Arthur Zimmermann, 20 October 1915," October 20, 1915, 346, R21655, PA AA.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Hoffmann, *War Diaries: And Other Papers*, 1:entry for 6 October 1915.

was, however, as willing to entertain multinational imperial models as he was anything else.[257]

Hans von Seeckt, chief of staff for August von Mackensen's 11th Army took a far less ambiguous position. Perhaps sensing the growing support for a German-Polish union within the army leadership, Seeckt drafted a memo for Falkenhayn, though it is unclear if he actually sent it.[258] Seeckt's memorandum inveighed against the notion of an autonomous Poland under German leadership, and argued that a Polish state would invariably betray Germany.[259] He accused Poles of political incompetence, and deemed them unfit to govern their own affairs.[260] As with many nationalizing imperialists, however, this bravado apparently veiled his deeper insecurity that Poles might threaten the German Empire if ever granted statehood. Seeckt worried that any Polish state would serve as a forum to organize, coordinate, and supply Polish nationalist movements in Prussia.[261] He also quickly asserted that whatever insurances, constitutional clauses, and mechanisms of control Berlin appended to the creation of a Polish state, Germany could not prevent "this Slav-state" from throwing its newfound military weight on "the side of Russia or Austria in the event of a new international struggle".[262] Similarly, Germany could not consider fashioning a "Polish-German federal state", as it would not be "reliable" politically.[263] The only option left for building a "defensive wall" in the east, Seeckt concluded, was to again partition Congress Poland, and annex Germany's share directly to the Prussian state.[264]

However, even Seeckt shied from radical methods of ethnic management to secure German control over these new regions. He admitted that the idea of "deporting all residents over the border and opening the entire land to new German settlement", was simply too impractical, and of questionable utility, to permit. He reserved only Germany's right to refuse to repatriate Polish refugees displaced by Russia's "Great Retreat".[265] Berlin would fashion a new province of "South Prussia" from the annexations, but Seeckt conceded that Polish national culture should "not be extirpated" in this region, and that Prussia should probably grant Poles a "certain provincial autonomy and self-governance".[266] Therefore, even as Seeckt castigated the creation of an autonomous Polish state, he bowed to at least some precepts of multinationalist ethnic management. Though unwilling to grant Poles their own military, Seeckt recognized that some form of compromise with Polish nationalists was probably inevitable.

The institution of the German Army, therefore, had produced a strong faction in favor of a multinational German-Polish union. By the autumn 1915, the experience of mobilization, and early observations of occupied Russian Poland had convinced influential generals and staff officers that Polish autonomy could serve German imperial security. They were at least convinced that a German-Polish union presented less of a risk than provoking Polish national resistance through less compromising means of ethnic management. Some, like Falkenhayn, were at least partly motivated by the dire need to put Polish men in the trenches. Others supported a German-Polish union as a distinctly long-term vision of empire. Notably, opponents in the military did not reject an autonomous Polish state by arguing that recruitment in Poland would yield no troops, but rather prophesied the inevitable betrayal of Poland in a future conflict. By the autumn of 1915, the most powerful components of the German army; Chief of the General Staff, the Chief and staff officers of the Deputy General Staff, Chief of Staff for the Supreme Command on the Eastern Front, and the War Ministry, had all signaled their commitment or openness to, multinational models of imperial organization in Congress Poland.

The Foreign Office also contemplated the prospect of multinational empire in Poland in the Autumn of 1915, though more cautiously. Wilhelmstraße received a swell of proposals for a

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[257] Ibid., 1:entry for 18 September 1915.
[258] Hans von Seeckt, "Denkschrift 'Die Teilung Polens,'" 1915, 2, N247/52, BArch.
[259] Ibid., 3.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid., 2.
[262] Ibid., 3.
[263] Ibid., 4.
[264] Ibid., 3.
[265] Ibid., 5.
[266] Ibid.

German-Polish union from the public.[267] Semi-official memos also increasingly discouraged nationalizing methods of ethnic management. Max Sering had been contacted for his thoughts on restructuring Congress Poland earlier in the year. On 17 August 1915, Sering broke with his former colleague Friedrich von Schwerin. In a letter to Undersecretary of State Zimmermann, Sering stated that the reservoir of available Russian state-domains in Congress Poland was simply insufficient for the purposes of large-scale German colonization. The amount of land available for settling German migrants or to 'trade' with Polish landowners being relocated further east, was too small to Germanize any significant parcel of territory.[268] With nationalizing ethnic management practically impossible, Sering instead endorsed the creation of an "autonomous Poland" connected to Germany via "military convention".[269]

At the same time Foreign Office intelligence sources continued to fortify the perception on Wilhelmstraße that Polish political culture was predominantly Russophobic, and that Poles might be willing to accept German leadership if Poland were granted political autonomy. On 15 August 1915, the Political Department received an article entitled "Poland's Future" from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, detailing an interview with a prominent Polish Russian.[270] The item claimed that many Poles had been shocked and disillusioned by their brutal treatment during Russia's Great Retreat, and by contrast rather admired the fair, peaceful, and collaborative German occupation government under Wolfgang von Kries.[271]Poles, the article suggested, therefore increasingly favored a mutually beneficial "attachment of Poland to Germany", perhaps even as an "autonomous federal state" of the German Empire.[272]

On 8 September, the Chancellery shared a similarly upbeat report with the Foreign Office, which detailed interactions between German agents and Polish political leaders in Switzerland.[273] In light of Petrograd's obvious failure to follow-through on its earlier promises of reform, Berlin was informed that conversations with Polish politicians and intellectuals had revealed an emerging consensus in favor of Polish statehood and autonomy. By this, the report clarified, Poles understood that the "new state would be attached to one of the [Central European] empires in military, economic, and political relations.[274] The agent's conversation partners had repeatedly assured him that granting political autonomy would gradually secure Polish loyalty to the Central Powers.[275] Though initially anti-German, the reporter indicated that the Polish representatives had been satisfied with the behavior of the German occupation already established in part of Congress Poland. Moreover, he hinted, the robust performance of the German economy in recent decades had apparently impressed many of the national leaders, who were beginning to consider the German Empire as a more attractive option for permanent union than Austria-Hungary.[276] The "attachment to Germany" of an "autonomous Poland", the agent concluded, was altogether possible and advantageous, with certain care.[277] Apparently convinced by the report, one Foreign Office official summarized in an attached note that Poles wanted, above all, a national-state, and that possible qualifications on their sovereignty or "dependence" on a foreign power constituted secondary concern for most Polish nationalists.[278] The present experiences, he agreed, portended well for the German Empire, and he added that Germany appeared to have forged a good relationship with Archbishop Kakowski of Warsaw.[279]

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[267] Nicholaus Arps, "Was muss mit Russisch-Polen politisch geschehen?," August 1915, 92–98, R21574, PA AA.
[268] Max Sering, "Letter to Undersecretary Zimmerman, 17 August 1915," August 17, 1915, 127, R21574, PA AA.
[269] Ibid., 128.
[270] Neue Zürcher Zeitung, "'Polens Zukunft,'" August 15, 1915, 133–34, R21574, PA AA.
[271] Ibid., 134.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Prelate Skirmunt, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 8 September 1915," September 8, 1915, 200, R21574, PA AA.
[274] Ibid., 202.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid., 203–4.
[277] Ibid., 204.
[278] von Stockhammern, "Memo to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 12 September 1915," September 12, 1915, 208, R21574, PA AA.
[279] Ibid.

The Foreign Office, however, actually proved more hesitant to commit to a German-Polish solution than military leaders. Wilhelmstraße was both cognizant of the complexities that any solution to the Polish question might present, and preoccupied with maintaining Germany's indispensible wartime alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Foreign Officers were therefore especially reluctant to close the door on an Austro-Polish solution, for fear that this might jeopardize Vienna's commitment to the war effort, or its future fidelity to Germany. An Austro-Polish solution also promised unique theoretical advantages for Berlin. One likely form of annexation, Austro-Trialism, would reorganize the Austro-Hungarian Empire, merging Galicia and Congress Poland into a new Polish state in Personal union with the Austrian crown on the model of 1867 *Ausgleich*. Polish regions would lose their representation in the Cisleithanian Reichsrat, severing Poles' direct influence on imperial policy-making and simultaneously securing a dominant political position for Austro-German parties. German policy-makers did not harbor any concern for their co-nationalists in the dual monarchy per-se, but they hoped that an empowered Austro-German population would facilitate Germany's influence over Austro-Hungarian politics.[280] Given the risks inherent in any German-Polish solution, concerns over satisfying their indispensible ally, and the prospect of Austro-Trialism reinforcing Berlin's overall leadership in Central Europe, many in the Foreign Office initially preferred granting Congress Poland to Vienna. At the same time, many of these same officials wanted additional measures to fortify German influence in Vienna and Congress Poland.

Given his mandate, it was entirely natural that the German ambassador to Vienna, Heinrich von Tschirschky, expressed his inclination towards an Austro-Polish solution in October 1915. However, cognizant of Berlins' pressing strategic interests in Congress Poland, Tschirschky noted that Germany could only relinquish its claim if it could simultaneously gained influence over the region by other means. That is, Berlin could only release Poland if the expanded Austro-Hungarian Empire were simultaneously bound to Germany through a permanent economic union.[281] This was a prevalent attitude within the Foreign Office. Treutler also worried that Falkenhayn's desire for a Polish satellite state might endanger Germany's alliance with Austria-Hungary.[282] Like Tschischky, Treutler considered German interests urgent enough that he proposed a hybrid solution for the region. An Austro-Polish solution was necessary to sate Vienna, but Treutler suggested that Berlin secure its pressing strategic interests by retaining "German-control" of the Russian-Polish border through a "military convention".[283] In essence, Treutler and Tschirschky attempted to combine the Austro-Polish solution with a larger *mitteleuropäisch* solution. Treutler also considered border modifications necessary to accept even this modified Austro-Polish solution, but cautioned against excessively large seizures. He worried that a larger Polish and Jewish population might destabilize Prussian and German domestic politics.[284] Restricting Prussia's gains, he emphasized, was especially important because any notion of transplanting frontier populations further into Congress Poland could yield only "modest" results.[285] Treutler's note did not clarify if he doubted the political tenability of population transfers, if he foresaw practical difficulties to expulsions, or if he understood that there was insufficient vacant land in Congress Poland to entice voluntary Polish emigration. Regardless of the particular reason, Treutler added his voice to the growing chorus of highly placed imperial officials and diplomats who doubted the advisability of nationalizing methods of ethnic management in the summer of 1915. Thus in the Autumn of 1915, both Tschirschky and Treutler considered the German-Austrian relationship both important and fragile enough to warrant an Austro-Polish solution. Yet they saw German strategic interests in Congress Poland as urgent enough to demand some form of influence over Poland, Austria-Hungary, or both.

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[280] Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 238.
[281] Heinrich von Tschirschky, "Report to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 10 October 1915," October 10, 1915, 277–78, R21655, PA AA.
[282] von Treutler, "Letter to the Foreign Office, 31 August 1915," 205–6.
[283] Ibid., 206.
[284] von Falkenhayn, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 8 September 1915," 209.
[285] Ibid., 211.

State Secretary von Jagow moved cautiously in this period. By the summer of 1915, he energetically supported a policy of driving back Russia's western frontier, and was therefore attracted to the *Randstaatenpolitik* articulated by Rohrbach.[286] Nonetheless, in these autumn months of 1915, Jagow's Foreign Office endorsed an Austro-Polish solution as the least risky approach to reorganizing Eastern Europe.[287] In a 2 September memorandum, Jagow emphasized that Congress Poland represented the German Empire's primary strategic priority in Eastern Europe, and could not be allowed to remain under Russian sovereignty.[288] The State Secretary staked out the Foreign Office's position that Poland constituted a civilized occidental nation with a sophisticated political culture.[289] He did not believe the Germanization of Poles to be practical. Jagow rejected the annexation of any considerable Polish territory to Prussia, or the incorporation of Congress Poland as a federal state. Both were likely to cause political turmoil in the Prussian Landtag or German Reichstag.[290] He similarly worried that Germany could not rule "foreign nations" like Poland against their will without an untenably "firm hand".[291] At this point, Jagow still worried about the implications for German immigration policy and migratory labor if Berlin established a Polish satellite state.[292] Jagow therefore counseled a more conservative program of limited border annexations in compensation for an Austro-Polish solution. He pondered if these should be secured by resettlement agreements.[293]

The Chancellery experienced mounting pressure, from both official and unofficial channels, to adopt a multinationalist imperial agenda for Congress Poland at this moment. The Foreign Office relayed many of its reports, suggesting either the sympathy of Russian Poles, or the possibility of long-term German-Polish collaboration, to the Chancellery.[294] Matthias Erzberger also led a faction connected to the Foreign Office in agitating for a multinationalist approach to Poland. Erzberger himself constantly pressed for immediate reforms in Prussia to consolidate Polish trust towards the German Empire. On 1 August, Erzberger forwarded a recent article in the Catholic publication *Germania*, "On the German-Polish Understanding", which argued that most Poles had demonstrated loyalty both in their service to the Prussian army and in their support for the continuing integrity of the German Empire.[295] The article concluded by calling for the closure of the Prussian settlement commission, the abolition of the expropriation law, and retreat from linguistic Germanization in public education. These measure, the author insisted, were key to fortify Polish loyalty as a "Bulwark" against the future "Russian flood".[296]

Erzberger also continued to call for the creation of a Polish Kingdom under German suzerainty, and coordinate a multinationalist lobby to this end. He did not shy from invoking the Holy See. On 27 August 1915, Erzberger forwarded a recent report from a German Prelate on his discussions with Pope Benedict XV over the fate of Poland. According to his Prelate, the "view of his Holiness is, that Poland should again become its own Catholic Kingdom, as it was in the old days. Germany and Austria would thereby win the hearts of all Poles, and it would create a state, that would form, so to speak, a 'bulwark' against Orthodox Russia".[297] The report further suggested that the papacy had insisted on Polish political autonomy, but had indicated that it could accept a "common military administration" linking Congress Poland and the Central Powers. Erzberger had previously expounded upon the strategic benefits of a German-Polish union. He now attempted to present multinational imperialism as more compatible with key sectors of international opinion. International Catholicism might recoil at the oppression of

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[286] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 202.
[287] Foreign Office, "Memorandum on the Polish Question," October 25, 1915, 11, NL Jagow 3, PA AA.
[288] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Memorandum on the Polish Question," September 2, 1915, 216, R21655, PA AA.
[289] Ibid., 215.
[290] Ibid., 218–19.
[291] Ibid., 220.
[292] Ibid., 219.
[293] Ibid., 223.
[294] E.G. Prelate Skirmunt, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 8 September 1915," 200.
[295] Matthias Erzberger, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, Including Copy of 'Zur Deutsch-Polnische Verständigung', 1 August 1915," August 1, 1915, 186, R43/1397a, BArch.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Matthias Erzberger, "Letter to Bethmann Hollweg, 27 August 1915," August 27, 1915, 202–3, R21655, PA AA.

Poland, but the papacy would celebrate the incorporation of Poland into a German-led occident.

Erzberger's *Zentralstelle* also led an increasingly vocal faction around the Foreign Office in favor of a multinational imperial model for ruling Polish space. By this point, Rohrbach had already publicly hinted at his preference for a German-led Central European confederation for more than a year.[298] Now, in October 1915, he led his committee on Russia and Eastern Europe within the *Zentralstelle* in drafting a memorandum simply entitled "Russian" [*Russisches*].[299] The paper officially backed the restoration of a Polish state, as well as its territorial expansion as far eastward into the Russian Empire as possible, as the surest means of securing the German Empire's eastern frontier.[300] Though not stated outright, the memorandum implied that Berlin would establish this Polish state under the auspices of a German-led confederation, or directly under its suzerainty. The *Zentralstelle*'s close institutional collaboration with the Foreign Office, Chancellery, and the nascent occupation government in Warsaw ensured that the Rohrbach-memorandum was practically broadcast throughout the highest echelons of the imperial government. Both the RAI and the Civilian Administration of the GGW received copies.[301]

If Bethmann Hollweg had vacillated on Poland throughout the summer, by August 1915 he had narrowed Germany's options. If Germany could not secure a separate peace with Petrograd, the Chancellor believed the Central Powers needed to seize control of all of Congress Poland. He therefore supported either Austro-Trialism or binding Poland as an "autonomous state" [*selbständiger Staat*] to the German Empire through a permanent "alliance and military convention".[302] As noted above, by 4 August, The Chancellor had already prohibited the new occupation from implementing policies that could potentially incense Polish nationalists. He did not yet want to close off any options for the future organization of Congress Poland, particularly because he leaned increasingly towards resolutions of the Polish question premised on collaboration with Poles. In an 11 August report to the Kaiser, Bethmann Hollweg noted his preference for thrusting back the Russian Empire by parceling off its western patchwork of national minorities into independent or autonomous states.[303] Whether this *Randstaatenpolitik* would create a new trialist monarchy or a German-Polish union, antagonizing the Poles of Central Europe promised substantially more injury than gain for German strategic interests. Whichever solution Germany chose, the Chancellor believed that "Poland [can] only form an effective defensive wall against the Russian Pan-Slavic flood, if Poland [is] not our foe, but our friend".[304] "Only under this pre-condition is it possible to hope" he added, "that nationalist influences on our Poles might remain reasonable safe [*gefahrlos*]".[305] The imperial occupation, Bethmann Hollweg warned, would therefore need to dispel any appearance of Germanization, as any mistreatment would "avenge us in the future".[306] Bethmann Hollweg therefore considered partition of Congress Poland a last resort, more likely to "whip up" dangerous "Polish nationalist passions" than achieve any lasting strategic gains.[307]

By August 1915 Bethmann Hollweg basically accepted that establishing an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty was both plausible and advantageous. He was unconcerned that Russian Poles had failed to celebrate the German conquest of Poland, and indeed he insisted that this fact should not affect policy decisions in Berlin.[308] The immediate reaction of the Polish masses, after all, was far less important than Germany's ability to influence Polish elites. Indeed the Chancellor already contemplated political strategies which Germany might use to win Polish

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[298] See, for example, Paul Rohrbach, "Mühlestein: ‚Deutschlands Sendung'," *Das größere Deutschland* 1, no. 32 (November 1914): 965.
[299] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 200.
[300] Paul Rohrbach, "Russisches," 1915, 60, R1501/119780, BArch.
[301] Ibid., 30.
[302] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Paul von Hindenburg, 17 August 1915," August 17, 1915, 8–9, NL Jagow 3, PA AA.
[303] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 199.
[304] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Paul von Hindenburg, 17 August 1915," 9.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.

support for multinational union:

> A friendly relationship to the clergy, incorporation of reliable Polish elements into the administrative service. Existing organizations for the uplift of peasants and townspeople to be handled carefully and, under certain conditions, supportively.[309]

With policies targeted to win over Polish social and intellectual elites, Bethmann Hollweg felt confident that Berlin convince Poles to accept German suzerainty. He credited reports that the "attractive force" [*Attraktionskraft*] of the Austro-Hungarian Empire within the Polish public was sinking due to limited military competence of the dual monarchy when compared the German Empire.[310] Poles, he believed, would rationally seek the sponsorship of the Great Power which could most effectively defend their state without trampling on Polish autonomy. If Berlin could convince Polish national elites of the German Empire's benevolence towards Polish culture, the Chancellor believed that Poles would accept German suzerainty out of necessity.

As with the Foreign Office, the centrality of the Austro-Hungarian alliance and the necessity of pleasing Vienna, compelled Bethmann Hollweg to keep an Austro-Polish solution on the table. The possibility that a Central European confederation might eventually bring the whole of Austria-Hungary(-Poland) under Berlin's influence also mitigated the apparent costs of this solution. In 13 August discussions with Austro-Hungarian representatives, Bethmann Hollweg therefore expressed his openness to an Austro-Polish solution, so long as Suwałki were ceded to the German Empire.[311] This, however, remained a tentative exchange of ideas, and was not taken as a binding agreement. The agreement, which officially established the joint occupation of Congress Poland, explicitly left the final status of Poland open, stating that the occupation would in no way prejudice the final resolution of the Polish question.

Indeed, the Chancellor's only decisive intervention in the Polish question at this moment was to publicly state Germany's intention to sponsor, rather than undermine, Polish national claims. In a famous speech before the Reichstag on 19 August 1915, Bethmann Hollweg announced Germany's intention to be the patron of the freedom of Europe's smaller nations, and that the conquest of Poland would constitute "the beginning of a development which will rid the old antagonisms between Germans and Poles, and which will lead this land, liberated from the Russian yoke, to a happy future, in which it can maintain and develop the particular character of its national life".[312] One could naturally doubt the sincerity of these promises. Yet given Bethmann Hollweg's interest in multinational imperialism, and his established concerns about aggressive Germanization, it appears that the Chancellor had genuinely abandoned the nationalizing paradigm of imperialism by August 1915. However Germany chose to secure its objectives in Congress Poland, he believed that Berlin needed to account for, and to some extent satisfy, the claims of Polish nationalists if it wanted regional stability.

A vocal multinationalist faction within the Chancellery and RAI also pressured Bethmann Hollweg to commit to the creation of an autonomous Polish kingdom directly under German suzerainty. With Germany facing new strategic conditions, Kurt Riezler resumed his agitation on behalf of a multinational imperium in Poland. On 20 August 1915, Riezler circulated a new memo among the imperial offices. Polish statehood, the memo stated bluntly, was inevitable at this point, and the new small state would not be able to survive militarily or economically without the sponsorship of a neighboring great power.[313] Riezler staunchly opposed any partition or annexation of Russian Polish territory. Direct territorial control, he asserted, would only serve to make "all Poles into enemies" of the German Empire, and practically destabilize Berlin's hold in the region.[314] Any Germanization efforts would only "perpetually

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[309] Ibid., 10.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 200; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 97.
[312] Quoted in Hans Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 1915, 130.
[313] Kurt Riezler, "Memorandum on the Polish Question," August 20, 1915, 136, R21574, PA AA.
[314] Ibid., 137.

reopen a wound" in the German-Polish relationship, and push Poles into the arms of Berlin's rivals.[315] Instead Riezler argued that the permanent political and military attachment of this new Polish state to the German Empire would best secure Germany's eastern frontier and economic interests.[316] A successfully incorporated Polish state would bulwark the German Empire's military resources, and provide the German army with a more defensible strategic position from which to leverage them. Riezler also predicted that, if incorporated as a permanent component of the German Empire, Polish claims to the Prussian east would gradually lose any practical meaning.[317]

Riezler dismissed concerns that a Polish state would subvert or betray its German suzerain. Pointing to recent reports on political sentiment in Congress Poland, Riezler assured his colleagues that Poles would accept German Suzerainty as legitimate and reliably serve the interests of the German Empire.[318] Poles' chief grievance against the German Empire, the official noted, was Prussia's Germanization policies. To win the trust and collaboration of Polish nationalists, Riezler therefore encouraged the imperial and Prussian governments to abolish Prussia's anti-Polish measures, immediately begin to Polonize the civil administration in occupied Russian Poland, and subsequently guarantee the political autonomy of a Polish state.[319] According to Riezler, if Berlin could alleviate this central concern, Polish nationalist sentiment would quickly fall into lockstep with Germany's interests. The German Empire controlled the lion's share of Congress Poland, including the ancestral capitol of Warsaw, and was thus in a position to fulfill much of the Polish nationalist agenda by establishing an autonomous state. Aware that their new state required a military guardian and economic patron, Riezler believed that Polish elites would accept this autonomy under conditions of German leadership.[320]

Riezler, like most of his colleagues, considered the fate of Congress Poland one of Germany's most urgent strategic priorities in the war. Yet he also made it clear that he considered the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty as a broader model of imperial organization, connected to both the domestic constitution of the German Empire and future questions of expansion.

> For the development of Germany domestically, as for our relationship to surrounding minor powers [*Kleinstaaten*], it would be a blessing, if Germany can show the world, that foreign nations that attach themselves to it [the German Empire], are not oppressed.[321]

Riezler therefore supported the establishment of a German-Polish union, both as a major strategic gain for the German Empire in Eastern Europe, and as the first step in a fundamental restructuring of Germany as a multinational empire.

The State Secretary of the Imperial Office of the Interior, Clemens von Delbrück had grappled with how to assert German interests in Congress Poland throughout 1915, but increasingly leaned towards a solution based upon compromise and collaboration with Polish nationalism. Like many in the imperial government, the Austro-Polish solution had never enthused Delbrück. Though perhaps willing to tolerate Austrian gains as a necessary compromise with an indispensible ally, Delbrück never encouraged Vienna's designs. By February he had already instructed the military occupation not to facilitate or accommodate Polish groups or Austrian agents who advocated an Austro-Polish solution.[322] Over the course of 1915 Delbrück had also cautiously suggested the possibility of claiming minimal annexations

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[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid., 138.
[317] Ibid., 139.
[318] Ibid., 136.
[319] Ibid., 138–39.
[320] Ibid., 139–40.
[321] Ibid., 140.
[322] Clemens von Delbrück, "Letter to von Brandenstein, 4 February 1915," February 4, 1915, 6–8, R1501/119790, BArch.

along the Polish border and returning the territory to Russia in a separate peace.[323]

But as hopes for a separate peace with Petrograd dimmed, Delbrück revised his preferred agenda for Poland. In a 21 September 1915 letter to the Chancellor, Delbrück noted that both the Austro-Polish solution and the prospect of "complete independence" for Poland seemed increasingly dangerous. Polish nationalists, Delbrück warned, might induce either Warsaw or Vienna to pursue claims on Prussian territory.[324] Delbrück perceived an irresolvable paradox in these solutions. To mitigate the threat of irredentism, the State Secretary lamented, Berlin would require expansive annexations to fortify its eastern frontier. Yet these annexations would expand Prussia's Polish minority even as they were sure to turn Polish nationalist sentiment decisively against the German Empire.[325] Tellingly, Delbrück did not even mention the possibility of securing annexed territory through aggressive nationalization. If he had ever contemplated Germanization, colonization, autocratic rule, and/or ethnic cleansing, Delbrück had discarded these methods by September 1915. Absent a viable method of securing annexed territory, he concluded that Germany could accept neither Polish independence nor Austrian sovereignty.

Having exhausted other conceivable imperial models, Clemens von Delbrück admitted to the Chancellor that the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty represented the only viable means of achieving German objectives in the region.[326] Unlike some, Delbrück was no enthusiastic supporter of multinational imperialism, and he worried that Polish nationalism might yet turn the new state against Germany and transform it into Prussia's "new Serbia".[327] However, every potential solution to the Polish question contained this threat. German suzerainty at least afforded Berlin the opportunity to influence political sentiment in the new Polish state. If Prussia abolished its anti-Polish measures, Delbrück hoped that Berlin could foster trust and loyalty within the new Polish state.[328] By September 1915, therefore, the State Secretary of the RAI believed that a German-Polish union represented Berlin's only viable option for achieving its strategic objectives in Congress Poland. Though pessimistic, he still hoped that Polish national interests could be reconciled with German imperial interests, and that Poland could be cultivated as a loyal component of the German imperium.

For the moment, Delbrück enjoined his superior not to move on this recommendation, as he feared that suddenly demanding German control over Congress Poland might alienate Austria-Hungary. At this juncture, he suggested offering Vienna a compromise based on the partition of Poland. Berlin might be able to negotiate for Austria-Hungary's divestment from Russian Poland at a later date. If not, Delbrück recommended establishing Germany's partition as an "autonomous" state with limited sovereignty, bound militarily and economically to the German Empire.[329]

The Prussian government stood alone among the major components of the German imperial structure in remaining predominantly opposed to the multinationalist incorporation of Congress Poland. Much of the leadership of the Prussian Interior Ministry and other central still considered the Germanization of the *Ostmark* essential for politically stabilizing and securing the region. Backing multinational imperialism effectively demanded the renunciation of these efforts and a fundamental reorientation of Prussian policy. Loebell, believing that Poles could not be trusted, steadfastly held to his position of the summer, promoting limited annexations secured through invasive Germanization. So far, his subordinates held the line.

When German military success again raised the prospect of seizing Congress Poland, therefore, key figures within virtually every agency of the German Empire with a vested interest in the Polish question began to promote the creation of a multinational German-Polish union as the most effective means of securing Germany's strategic objectives. As in the public sphere,

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[323] Clemens von Delbrück, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 21 September 1915," September 21, 1915, 25, R1501/119670, BArch.
[324] Ibid., 25–27.
[325] Ibid., 27.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Ibid., 29.
[329] Ibid., 27–28.

debate over German aims and modes of ethnic management distilled around the central question of whether an autonomous Polish state could be relied upon to serve and defend the German Empire. Clearly, by the autumn of 1915, much of the imperial leadership believed that the successful mobilization of Polish conscripts, paired with early observations of political sentiment in occupied Poland, had already answered this question in the affirmative. Of course opinion remained split, and some officials insisted that Polish nationalism constituted an inherent threat to the German Empire. Yet the institutional cultures of the German army, Foreign Office, Chancellery, and RAI had proven just as capable of imagining, and incubating support for, multinational imperialism, as the German public sphere. The same fault-line between visions of a German nation-state secured by national homogeneity and a German Empire that drew strength and flexibility from its institutional protection for heterogeneity also ran through Berlin, and often individuals within the *Reichsleitung*. But among the highest authorities of the German Empire, credence for the possibility of multinational collaboration remained the default position. Still, the question of Poland's prospective loyalty to the German Empire would become one of the central preoccupations of the developing Government General of Warsaw.

German Occupation Experience and the Fortification of Multinationalist Assumptions

The views on imperial policy and ethnic management held by the Governor General Hans Hartwig von Beseler and his military and civilian staff in the GGW evolved rapidly from August 1915 through the spring of 1916. From their experience in occupying the Polish population, military and civilian personnel concluded that, with intelligent policy in Berlin and credible protections for Polish autonomy, Poles could be cultivated as loyal collaborators of the German Empire, and could be trusted to defend a German-Polish union. Beseler and much of the GGW ultimately adopted essentially the same assumptions and arguments staked out by multinational imperialists in public debates. They came to see Poland as a culturally sophisticated and politically capable nation, if somewhat inexperienced. They concluded that the unifying element of Polish politics was the desire for political and cultural autonomy, and that Polish nationalist elites would be capable of mobilizing resistance to almost anything that fell short of this goal.[330] Simultaneously, Beseler and his advisors worried about a 'Polish Serbia', concluding that an independent Poland, or one bound to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, would pursue irredentist claims against core Prussian provinces.[331]

The German administration in Warsaw therefore ultimately reached the same conclusion that imperial agencies in Berlin, and influential segments of the public sphere, were already grasping towards. Beseler eventually recommended the establishment of an almost fully autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty.[332] Both he and his advisors insisted that military and political union would more effectively secure the territory and rights of both Poland and Germany.[333] The German administration in Warsaw soon joined in the chorus of voices pressing Berlin to bind a Kingdom of Poland to the German Empire through a series of economic treaties, military and political conventions, and articles inscribed into both the German and Polish constitutions.[334] Beseler even came to support the incorporation of White Ruthenian and Lithuanian territory into the new Kingdom of Poland, on the assumption that a stronger Poland would ultimately fortify German security.[335] Warsaw's reports and emphatic proposals finally dispelled most lingering doubts in Berlin about the willingness of Poles to accept German suzerainty. GGW backing finally swung the preponderance of the imperial apparatus into action behind multinational imperialism in Poland.

Beseler and the GGW played an important role in shaping Berlin's imperial policy for Poland, but several parameters for the occupation were already firmly established by August 1915. Policy-makers in Berlin were increasingly supportive of either an Austro-Polish or

[330] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 36.
[331] Ibid., 240.
[332] Ibid., 25.
[333] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 40.
[334] Ibid., 24.
[335] Ibid., 46.

German multinational solutions to the Polish question, and were suspicious of nationalizing imperialism. The new GGW was therefore enjoined to continue Kries's benevolent occupation policies and improve Germany's image among the population. Polish sympathy would be necessary under a German multinational approach, indispensible if Poland were awarded to Austria, and usefully irritating to Petrograd if negotiations returned the region to Russian control. Occupation policy in August 1915 was therefore based upon continuity with Kries's policies, and Berlin's own imperial preferences.

Hans Hartwig von Beseler was, himself, initially ambivalent about ethnic management and imperial policy. Beseler had been born to an elite Prussian family. His father, Georg, had been a law Professor, and his brother Max had been appointed as the Prussian Minister of Justice in 1905, and elevated to the Prussian House of Lords in the same year. Hans had chosen soldiering as a career, and had first seen action in the Franco-Prussian war. Beseler had risen quickly through the ranks, and had been widely regarded as the most capable potential successor of Alfred von Schlieffen for the position of Chief of the Prussian General Staff. After being passed over for the promotion Beseler continued his career for a few years before retiring from active duty in 1911 at the age of 61. In 1914 the army had recalled him to service. In the first two years he became something of a minor-celebrity, earning a reputation for smashing daunting enemy fortresses, first at Antwerp, and then at Nowo-Georgiesk, outside of Warsaw. With the successful capture of Nowo-Georgiesk in August 1915, Beseler achieved a spectacular victory for the German War effort, facilitating the continued juggernaut of the Gorlice-Tarnów offensive and capturing over 90,000 soldiers, 30 generals, and hordes of materiel and weapons.

Beseler was offered the governorship at a high point in his career, and he was understandably reluctant to accept. He felt more useful as a soldier.[336] Beseler had no professional background in either governing a large territory, nor in Polish affairs. He did not feel especially warmly to the Polish nation upon taking his position. Before the war, he had contributed writings to the *Archiv für innere Kolonisation*, Sering and Schwerin's journal founded to support the settlement of Germans in thinly populated areas of the Prussian East.[337] Private comments made shortly after taking office suggested that Beseler initially believed fear and discipline would be more effective in ruling the region than friendship.[338] However, Beseler operated within the fairly narrow parameters established by Berlin, which more or less mandated the cultivation of friendly or neutral relations with the Polish population. After taking office, Beseler quickly set himself to studying the Polish Russian population, and the political conditions of the region.

For the most part, Beseler, his advisors, and the personnel of the GGW did not perceive the population of Russian Poland as uncivilized or incapable of managing their own affairs. Indeed, few seemed to have questioned Polish competence. When the German administration discussed the desperate material conditions in the region, they blamed Russian brutality or mismanagement and assumed that local Poles would be instrumental in the process of reconstruction. Beseler had himself witnessed the destruction left in the wake of Russia's 'Great Retreat', and denounced their measures of forcibly deporting the Polish population eastward. His reports castigated the Russian army for robbing the civilian population of desperately needed foodstuffs and coal, especially from the area around Warsaw. One of his first priorities, he noted, would be to restock these sorely needed "inventories with all speed".[339] After touring provinces of the GGW wrecked by retreating Russian units, he lamented that "barely a third of the country" could be brought into cultivation for lack of workers and horses, both of which "the Russians chased, abducted, or carried away".[340] Beseler complained that Russian propaganda accused Germany of "barbarism" and cruelty, even as "these dogs laid the whole country to waste

[336] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 24 August 1915," August 24, 1915, 1, N30/53, BArch.
[337] Robert L Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 69.
[338] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 34.
[339] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des Generalgouvernements Warschau (Bericht des Generalgouverneurs Hans von Beseler)," October 23, 1915, 5, PH30-II/5, BArch.
[340] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 16 October 1915," October 16, 1915, 29, N30/53, BArch.

without sense or purpose, and drove out hundreds of thousands [of people] into the most mournful misery".[341] The Russians, Beseler complained, were "spoilers of lands and nations".[342]

The GGW assumed that repairing this destruction would require the cooperation and input of the Polish population. One German civilian official, reporting on administration in Sokołow and Węgrów, discussed the absence of a local Polish governing elite. He attributed this political underdevelopment to Russia's conscientious decision to systematically exclude Poles from political power or administrative authority for decades. Tellingly, he opted to resolve the issue by establishing civilian-led "District Economic Committees" in which local leaders could be trained the complexities of government and be given a forum for articulating their needs to occupation authorities.[343] From district officials to the Governor General, the GGW administration approached Poland as a region that had been long neglected, and then systematically wrecked, by the Russian Empire. Far from blaming "*Polnische Wirtschaft*" for the local state of affairs, the GGW assumed Polish civilians would be instrumental in rebuilding their country.

The GGW was established with clear parameters, but nebulous goals. However several key positions in the administration were staffed either with multinational imperialists, or with personnel who were sympathetic to this paradigm of ethnic management. They helped to mold GGW policy in a multinationalist direction. As noted above, Beseler's chief of civilian administration, Wolfgang von Kries, favored statism over nationalizing imperialism. Though worried about Berlin's ability to control an autonomous Polish state, Kries believed that Poles could be more or less harmoniously integrated into the German Empire. Count Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, the scion of a Polish Prussian aristocratic family, a conservative loyalist of the Hohenzollern regime, and a personal acquaintance of the Kaiser oriented Beseler to his new post, and quickly became a key advisor.[344] Beseler inherited prior occupation's press department chief, Georg Cleinow, the conservative multinationalists who had publicly supported the incorporation of an autonomous Polish state into a German imperial system since January of 1915.[345] Cleinow retained his mandate to censor and influence the Polish press in a "German-friendly sense".[346] The GGW preserved the original occupation's productive collaborative relationship with Erzberger's *Zentralstelle* on matters of press policy and political intelligence. Beseler reinforced this multinationalist inheritance by appointing Gerhard von Mutius, the Chancellor's cousin who had helped craft the September Program of 1914, as the Foreign Office's representative and diplomatic consultant to the GGW.[347] Mutius was also given responsibilities in the political police and press department, two functions essential for shaping and prosecuting occupation policy.

Beseler quickly began studying the complexities of the Polish question and developing his own views on Germany's interests and prospects in the region. He did not lack for reading material. Upon taking office, Beseler was inundated with brochures, academic proposals, and official memoranda promoting a variety of imperial paradigms and models of ethnic management for Russian Poland. Naturally, Beseler read through a plethora of documents promoting nationalizing models of imperialism. A typical proposal, authored by Retired Colonel and *Ostmarkenverein* member Cardenal von Widdern, recounted the standard objections that any sort of Polish statehood, even under German influence, would conspire to seize Upper Silesia, Posen, and West Prussia, either in coordination with Prussian traitors, or with Russian sponsorship.[348] Beseler received piles of similar *Ostmarkenverein* memoranda and propaganda

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[341] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 13 December 1915," December 13, 1915, 44, N30/53, BArch.
[342] von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 16 October 1915," 29.
[343] Regierungsrat Dr. Schlottman, "Report on the Administration of Sokołow and Węgrów to the RAI," March 26, 1916, 36, R1501/119760, BArch.
[344] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 35.
[345] Georg Cleinow, "Die Zukunft Polens," *Die neue Rundschau*, January 1915, 105.
[346] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 25 April 1915," 8.
[347] Theodor Lewald, "Letter to Arnold Wahnschaffe, 5 November 1915," November 5, 1915, 30, N2176/58, BArch.
[348] Cardenal von Widdern, "Unterredung des Oberst a. D. Cardenal von Widdern mit dem polnischen Grafen von Trebenski," December 28, 1915, 125–29, N30/34, BArch.

stumping for the annexation, colonization, and ethnic cleansing of a Polish border strip.[349] The Governor General took these documents seriously, annotating many of them. He took particular interest in their insistence on the potential mobilizing power of Polish nationalism. Reading one *Ostmarkenverein* account of Polish behavior in the early weeks of the war, Beseler underlined their discussion of the successful recruitment of voluntary Polish legions.[350]

If these readings taught Beseler to seriously regard the power of Polish nationalism, they still did not convince him of the wisdom of nationalizing imperialism. Indeed he grew increasingly dismissive of the model of ethnic management in the weeks and months after taking office. Beseler jotted skeptical marginalia throughout one proposal for a border-strip secured by German colonization and Polish resettlement, especially in response to the author's suggestion of dragooning Polish residents further east.[351] Tellingly, when the author claimed that "many" Polish Prussians hoped for a Russian victory, Beseler noted only "?-Evidence".[352] Apparently impressed by Prussian mobilization early in the war, Beseler already doubted that Germany's Polish minority harbored traitorous intentions towards Berlin. He was thus less inclined to accept the central premise of nationalizing imperialism, that the Polish nation represented an irreconcilable threat to German interests. In the fall of 1915, Beseler quickly eschewed nationalizing paradigms as counterproductive, more likely to incite Polish rage than resolve any existing problem.[353]

Conversely, multinationalist proposals elicited increasingly positive reactions from the Governor General. Beseler became well-versed with multinationalist intellectuals. He read *Das Größere Deutschland*.[354] He received Silvio Broedrich-Kurmahlen's August 1915 memo, "Das neue Ostland", which cast Poland as a heroic defender of occidental culture and the historic carrier of European civilization eastward against Muscovy.[355] His brochure already pressed Berlin to grant a Polish state "autonomy", and integrate it under German leadership.[356] He further recommended annexing "White Russia" to the new state, to foster Polish economic and cultural development, and thereby strengthen its German sponsor.[357]

Through the spring of 1916, Beseler digested a stack of multinationalist proposals, most of which shared the same fundamental assumptions. The Polish nation, they insisted was civilized, cultured, and politically sophisticated. They pointed to Congress Poles' wartime self-organization of local education initiatives to claim that Poles clearly possessed the mental wherewithal to "build a state" and thereby dispel the myth of Polish "organizational incapacity".[358] If not already aware, Beseler was informed of the achievements of Mickiewicz and Krasinski in literature; Chopin in music; Wronsti, Wroblewski, and Curie in science, each one demonstrating that Polish culture had already impressively contributed to the "humanity's common development", and could contribute "infinitely more" to human progress.[359] In light of Poland's accomplishments and the threat of Russian 'barbarism', multinationalist proposals insisted that Germany had a "moral right to separate all of this territory from Russia", and the "duty" to support its stately existence.[360] Beseler, the son of a Prussian university professor and socialized in academic traditions of Hegelian progress, represented the ideal audience for this

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[349] Dr. Th. Engelbrecht, "Ein Deutsches Siedlungsgebiet Im Osten," July 24, 1915, 64, N30/34, BArch; Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift über die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer östlichen Nachbargebiete," August 1915, 65, N30/34, BArch; Stellvertretender Generalstab, Zeitungstelle, "Polen: Ergebnisse der Pressabeobachtung," 102.
[350] Ostmarkenverein, "Haltung der Polen in Posen während der ersten 13. Kriegswochen," October 31, 1914, 17–19, N30/34, BArch.
[351] Bernhard Wegener, "Die Ostgrenze," August 18, 1914, 2, N30/34, BArch.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 40.
[354] Wilhelm Feldman, "Die politischen Zustände im Königreich Polen" (Das Größere Deutschland, August 14, 1915), 145–51, N30/34, BArch; Wilhelm von Massow, "Das Königreich Polen und wir" (Das Größere Deutschland, n.d.), 151–53, N30/34, BArch; Axel Schmidt, "Die Polnische Frage" (Das Größere Deutschland, August 28, 1915), 162–71, N30/34, BArch.
[355] Silvio Broedrich-Kurmahlen, "Das neue Ostland" (Ostlandverlag, August 28, 1915), 71–73, N30/34, BArch.
[356] Ibid., 74–77.
[357] Ibid., 74.
[358] Dr. Johannes Sachs, "Lecture on the Polish Question, April 1916," April 1916, 19, N30/35, BArch.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid., 17.

line of argumentation. Moreover, memoranda also emphasized that Polish *staatsfähigkeit* meant that Poles would offer sustained, organized, and effective resistance to Germanization policies.[361]

While memoranda emphasized that Polish national politics were united by the "desire for national autonomy", they simultaneously suggested that most Poles would accept the creation of an "autonomous Poland under German suzerainty [*Oberhoheit*]".[362] They insisted that this compromise solution would fulfill Germany's most urgent objectives, providing military control over the region, without engendering Polish resistance. Most admitted that few Polish Russians were actually sympathetic to the German Empire, but believed they would accept German suzerainty as a necessary strategic safeguard of their own autonomy against Russia.[363]

In contrast to his experiences with nationalizing proposals, Beseler's readings of multinationalist literature appear to have gradually persuaded him. Responding to Adolf Grabowsky's *Die Polnische Frage*, which had argued for a German-Austrian condominium over a satellite Polish state, Beseler wrote that he was deeply interested in the work, and agreed with Grabowsky on nearly every point. He disagreed only on the structure of the future Polish state, and its relations with the Central Powers.[364] His response to Ignaz Jastrow's report is also noteworthy. The Berlin professor had filled a semi-official role, filing confidential reports to both Berlin and Warsaw on his own discussions with Austrians and Polish politicians, as well as the political climate in Vienna. His 19 November report to Beseler urged the Governor General to stonewall the Austro-Polish solution, as this would encircle the German Empire with Austro-Hungarian territory and render its eastern frontier indefensible.[365] Instead, Jastrow joined the ranks of those advocating the creation of a Polish state bound in perpetual union to the German Empire through the "firmness of a military convention". This, he argued, would be the only effective means of securing the east from Russian invasion without inviting Austria-Hungary to Berlin's door-step.[366] When Jastrow wrote that Wieners suspected that Germany actually wanted control of all of Congress Poland, Beseler noted "Very Good!", in the margin.[367]

Multinationalist factions throughout the German government also pressed Beseler to adopt their imperial paradigm soon after he took office. Beseler received the Deputy General Staff's autumn 1915 memorandum, which called for the creation of a German-Polish union. He read it with apparent interest, underlining key sections. Beseler paid particular attention to the report's conviction that Poland strived to be an occidental "bastion of Catholic Christianity".[368] Whether the Deputy General Staff memo influenced Beseler's thinking is impossible to determine, but the document may well have inspired or even convinced Beseler of the wisdom of a multinationalist model for ruling Poland. When Beseler later articulated his preferred solution to the Polish question, it basically mimicked the Deputy General Staff memorandum.[369]

The Governor General's experiences in governing Congress Poland finally convinced him that a German-Polish union represented the most advantageous and reasonable solution to the Polish question. In the autumn of 1915, Beseler stated explicitly that he didn't quite trust the Poles, and that he felt Polish nationalists had made extravagant demands on the Central Powers.[370] Governing and policing Congress Poland during the autumn and winter of 1915 relaxed the fears of Beseler and the German occupiers, that Polish nationalists would resist or conspire to subvert the German Empire. The experience of occupation appeared to confirm, for Beseler and his subordinates, that intelligent management could eventually reconcile Polish nationalism with the interests of the German Empire. They came to believe that Poles were either already sympathetic

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[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., 20–22; Max Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 1916, 23–25, N30/35, BArch.
[363] Sachs, "Lecture on the Polish Question, April 1916," 21; Sering, "Die Zukunft Polens," 25.
[364] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Geheimrat Schiemann, 12 February 1916," February 12, 1916, 12, N30/54, BArch.
[365] Ignaz Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," November 19, 1915, 121, N30/34, BArch.
[366] Ibid., 121–22.
[367] Ibid., 119.
[368] Stellvertretender Generalstab, Zeitungstelle, "Polen: Ergebnisse der Pressabeobachtung," 100.
[369] Ibid., 87–108.
[370] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 21 November 1915," November 21, 1915, 37, N30/53, BArch.

to Berlin, because they understood that their security would depend upon German arms, or that such sympathy could be cultivated with relative ease.

Above all, the experience of occupying Poland quickly dispelled the notion that Poles were committed to stubbornly resisting German rule. Rather than zealous nationalist partisans or constant demonstrations for independence, German officials and soldiers experienced few major disturbances from the civilian population. Centers of Polish spiritual and intellectual life, like the Roman Catholic church, did not make trouble. Archbishop Kakowski of Warsaw remained deliberately aloof.[371] Kries happily described the Roman Catholic clergy as overtly apolitical in his reports, their behavior generally "correct" and displaying no "anti-German tone or sentiment".[372] In private correspondence Beseler also confessed that he hadn't perceived any major political unrest in Poland. All seemed quiet.[373] His first major report to the Kaiser in October painted a similar portrait.[374] Elsewhere, he noted agreeably that German soldiers never heard an "inappropriate word" or insult from civilians. In fact he believed that Poles had a "deep respect" for the occupiers and "admired" them in silence.[375] Whether or not Beseler correctly perceived these relations, German forces did maintain a relatively peaceful relationship with the civilian population. Police figures bear this out. Violence was not a daily fixture for much of the occupation. Over the course of 1916, the German occupation executed only 42 subjects, whether for crimes or espionage. In the same period, they imprisoned only 2 lawyers for anti-German political activity.[376] Among a population of roughly 6 million, the German occupiers found very little subversive activity worthy of harsh countermeasures. The lack of major resistance implied to GGW officials that local commitment to the Russian Empire might not be as fanatical as supposed, and that support for Polish independence might not be as zealous as expected.

Indeed, German occupation personnel soon concluded from their observations that, while Polish nationalism represented a potentially influential ideology, the prevailing political attitude in Congress Poland was actually ambivalence. Official study of Poland's political parties and organizations revealed a fractured political landscape. Poles could be roughly split between so-called "passivists", a mixed bag of loyalists and National Democrats who refused to collaborate with the occupation but appeared unwilling to oppose it, and "activists", less compromising supporters of secession from Russia. Adherents of Piłsudski's moderate socialist PPS were prominent in this later camp. Within and between these two predominant factions existed a whole array of smaller parties and splinters. GGW authorities soon optimistically interpreted this factionalism as a signal of political discord and confusion, rather than organized opposition and dissent. Beseler described the Poles as an "equivocal" political community, one "torn" among innumerable factions.[377] In October he reported to the Kaiser that the Poles lacked any political unity, and agreed only on their "wish for political autonomy".[378] At least for the duration of the war, Beseler assured his sovereign, political "disunity" and a "lack of clarity" over goals meant that Poles were unlikely to coordinate any effective active resistance to the German occupation.[379]

GGW authorities shared in Beseler's assessment. They increasingly doubted that any particular faction of nationalists had the ability or will to mobilize the masses either against the occupation or in favor of independence. So long as German occupation policy did not directly threaten Polish national culture, GGW personnel believed, nationalist resistance would remain a fringe phenomenon, lacking a convincing enemy to rally against. Occupation officials in Warsaw were not oblivious to anti-German activity. In early October, the Central Police Station in

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[371] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 49.
[372] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," June 30, 1916, 43, PH30-II/12, BArch.
[373] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 9 December 1915," December 9, 1915, 43, N30/53, BArch.
[374] von Beseler, "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des GGWs," 3.
[375] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 29 January 1916," January 29, 1916, 8, N30/54, BArch.
[376] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 55.
[377] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to General von Kleist, 3 October 1915," October 3, 1915, 23, N30/53, BArch.
[378] von Beseler, "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des GGWs," 8.PH30-II/5, 8.
[379] Ibid., 3.

Warsaw reported discovery of a hostile nationalist brochure, speaking of Poles' "irreconcilable hatred of Prussia and Germandom", and advising Poles not to collaborate, but save their strength for the coming battle of the "entire Polish nation for the reunification of the three partitions into an independent kingdom".[380] The Central Police Station deemed the brochure disconcerting enough to warrant notifying Beseler and the Foreign Office, and they initiated an investigation to source the document and determine how accurately it represented Polish sentiment.[381]

Overall, however, the GGW central authority did not consider the Polish population prepared to support any movement of overt nationalist resistance. An internal report entitled "The Party System in Congress Poland" provides a clear distillation of prevailing interpretations of Polish political attitudes in the GGW. The report in no way suggested that any significant portion of the population harbored sympathies, much less affection, for the German Empire. Indeed, it emphasized that the social politics of Congress Poland actually discouraged collaboration with the Central Powers. Politically influential landowners, the report argued, considered themselves dependent on the Russian autocracy, and worried that a change in sovereignty would entail land reform and the expropriation of their property.[382] The peasantry, the report continued, were "in general sympathetic to Russia and distrustful of the Legionary movement".[383] Finally, the bankers and industrialists of Congress Poland's cities were thought economically dependent upon access to Russia's large market. The urban merchants, artisans, and professionals were believed to lean towards *Endecja*.[384] Of any particular political faction, the report estimated that National Democracy was likely the most influential.[385] The report ended on an optimistic beat, suggesting that the local political landscape was united by the notion that the repressive system introduced by Russia after 1863 could not persist.[386]

Though observation suggested little popular sympathy for the German Empire, occupation authorities believed that, as long as German cultural policy did not directly provoke the local population, Polish nationalist movements would not be capable of mobilizing support for active resistance. In the autumn of 1915, Beseler believed that severe material shortages and economic difficulties were the most urgent danger to the GGW, much more likely than nationalist ideology to unite Poles into a single "movement of unrest". He therefore commanded his military governors to employ as many local men as possible either in the creation or repair of field fortifications to allay social discontent before it assumed political dimensions.[387] By April 1916, Beseler had become so convinced that the Polish population did not constitute a threat to the German occupation, that he ordered the steady release of Polish-speaking Russian prisoners of war. After a brief interview, and under condition of continuing surveillance by local police, men were allowed to return home and work to provide for their families.[388] By July 1916, roughly 700 former prisoners had already been released to their homes in the GGW.[389]

German authorities' conviction that the Polish nationalist movement was actually fragmented and only weakly influential explains the occupation's approach to two basic security issues in 1915-1916: banditry and nationalist paramilitarism. GGW authorities carefully distinguished between the two phenomenon. Officials interpreted banditry as an apolitical

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[380] Engelmann, "Report by the Zentrapolizeistelle of the GGW, 8 October 1915," October 8, 1915, 318, R21574, PA AA.
[381] Ibid., 318–19.
[382] GGW, "Das Parteiwesen in Kongresspolen," n.d., 3, N30/17, BArch.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid., 5.
[386] Ibid., 4.
[387] von Beseler, "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des GGWs," 4.
[388] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 20 April 1916," April 20, 1916, 3, R1501/119760, BArch.
[389] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 22 July 1916," July 22, 1916, 21, R1501/119760, BArch.

criminal activity.[390] Banditry in Congress Poland did not emerge primarily in response to economic pillage by the occupation. Economic conditions under the German occupation were harsh for the civilian population, but did not approach the ravenous exploitation perpetrated by authorities in Ober Ost. GGW authorities made at least some effort to mitigate the economic impact of the war on the population. Aiming to both ease unemployment in Poland and support the German war economy, occupation authorities coordinated labor markets and recruited Polish industrial and agricultural workers for jobs in Germany. Labor recruiters neither compelled Polish workers, nor forcibly deported them to Germany. Many factories in Warsaw and Łódź had been wrecked by the Russians, dismantled by invading German forces for their machinery or scrap, or now sat idle. Though war industry work was demanding, occupation authorities promised reasonable pay to workers in a region of high unemployment. They had little difficulty finding hundreds of thousands of volunteers.[391] Polish workers in Germany encountered relatively good conditions. They received decent wages, food and lodging, and time off for Sundays and holidays.[392] Under wartime provisions, only employers could terminate contracts, but Polish volunteers were apprised of this condition before signing.[393] To further encourage labor mobilization, the occupation did introduce *Arbeitszwang*, the practice of terminating state benefits to unemployed workers who declined an offer of employment in Germany.[394] Aside from this, any coerced labor near the front conformed to the Hague convention.[395] Labor unrest did occur. Polish workers held strikes in 1915 over issues of food, hours, and wages. But strikes rarely required intervention by soldiers and generally did not result in violence.[396]

Banditry instead emerged from the chaos in Congress Poland during the repeated manuevers of the German and Russian armies across the region in 1914 and 1915. Spurred by economic dislocation and desperation, and with few police to inhibit it, criminality had flourished in shadows of these armies. Both Brandenstein and Kries had raised the issue of banditry from the earliest weeks in their tenures, and both had repeatedly sought reinforcements to hunt the armed criminals who had resorted to pillage and robbery in the chaos of the fighting. Now Beseler too complained to Berlin that the occupation lacked the necessary troops to secure the territory and demanded reinforcements.[397] Kries echoed this plea in quarterly reports.[398] The chronic lack of police personnel initially crippled the occupation's ability to abate the plague of robbery, armed robbery, and murder in Congress Poland, especially prevalent in the countryside. The problem became increasingly urgent in 1915, in the wake of Russia's destructive 'Great Retreat', and Kries twice reported dolefully that bandits had murdered German personnel.[399]

Kries worried that unabated banditry would have political ramifications and that it threatened to undermine public confidence in German authorities.[400] However, he and other occupation officials clearly understood banditry as a problem of criminality, for the moment lacking any political motivation. Kries blamed banditry on both the occupation's lack of police in the countryside, the economic disruption caused by the war, and the wartime "barbarization" [*Verwilderung*] of society in Congress Poland.[401] Beseler essentially shared this interpretation.[402]

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[390] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 248. In discussing German policy in Eastern Europe, Hull has suggested that plunderous German economic policies eventually inspired partisan resistance to occupation, and that German observers generally misinterpreted these guerillas as armed criminals, or "bandits".
[391] Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation," 92–95.
[392] Ibid., 94.
[393] Ibid., 93.
[394] Ibid., 95.
[395] Ibid., 93.
[396] Ibid., 100.
[397] von Kries, "Vierteljahresberichte der Zivilverwaltung für Russisch-Polen, 25 April 1915," 3.
[398] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 1 October 1915," October 1, 1915, 4, PH30-II/9, BArch; von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht, 10 Januar 1916," 8; Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 31 March 1916," March 31, 1916, 6, PH30-II/11, BArch; von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," 5.
[399] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 1 October 1915," 5; von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 31 March 1916," 6.
[400] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 31 March 1916," 6.
[401] Ibid., 5–6.

German authorities' strategy for confronting banditry was shaped by their confidence that Polish nationalism had not begun to motivate violent resistance to the occupation in the countryside, and by their conviction that banditry stemmed from economic and social anomie. Thus Warsaw continued and accelerated the extant policy of recruiting and developing local Polish police forces and militias to secure the countryside.[403] If German authorities sometimes complained about the lacking quality or unpredictable performance of Polish militias[·], the GGW absolutely relied on their support to maintain order.[404] Accelerating the organization of Polish police militias made sense as a response to criminality, but would have been incomprehensible had German authorities already doubted the political reliability of the occupied population.

The development of police, the restoration of law and order, and efforts against banditry also became encouraging sites of collaboration between occupation authorities and civilian populations. Here German authorities and Polish civilians built mutual trust and Germans gained confidence in the abilities of the occupied population. Kries happily reported that Polish police officers and militias improved quickly with training.[405] With growing faith in the reliability and effectiveness of Polish militias, German commanders of urban police stations began to officially employ militias as salaried components of the police force in early 1916.[406] This program soon expanded into the countryside, where German gendarmes were supplemented with uniformed Polish "ancillary-gendarmes" [*Hilfsgendarmen*], equipped with service clubs and, occasionally, bicycles.[407] In Warsaw, the militia was eventually incorporated as a fully-empowered wing of the police force, under the command of the Polish Prussian Prince Ferdinand von Radziwiłł.[408] By March 1916, German confidence in Polish police had grown to the extent that Beseler sanctioned temporarily arming militia's with revolvers whilst hunting bandits. German authorities would carefully track the firearms, but trusted that they would be returned after proper use.[409]

Confidence in the reliability and effectiveness of Polish police grew in every level of the German administration. The Central Police Station in Warsaw began planning to form special anti-banditry police units, and delegate their command to local Poles.[410] Alternatively, one local civilian administrator in the northwest boasted of the successful overhaul of his region's native police force. Corrupt Russian-era personnel, he reported happily, had all been removed, replaced with paid and uniformed police wearing the red and white of Poland on an arm-band. Soon, he reported with excitement, their provision with side-arms would raise their effectiveness in combatting banditry and establishing order in the region.[411]

Over the course of 1915 and 1916, German authorities trusted that most Poles were uninterested in resisting the occupation, and had therefore interpreted rural violence as a predominantly criminal phenomenon. Consequently, they did not focus their efforts on repressing and surveiling the Polish population. Instead German officials enthusiastically delegated Poles increasing authority and responsibility for policing occupied areas. Moreover, they emblazoned these native police with symbols of Polish national dignity. The Occupation's assumptions were apparently correct. The GGW remained chronically short of occupying troops through its dissolution in 1918. Yet by German accounts, their strategy of collaboration worked. By the summer of 1916, Kries happily reported that a more pervasive police presence, augmented by Polish militias and personnel, had significantly contributed to the abatement of

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[402] von Beseler, "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des GGWs," 3.

[403] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 1 October 1915."

[·] Henceforth, "militia" [Miliz] will refer to officially sanctioned native police forces in Congress Poland, as distinct from nationalist paramilitaries or bandits.

[404] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 31 March 1916," 5.

[405] Ibid..

[406] Ibid.

[407] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," 5–6.

[408] Ibid., 5.

[409] von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 20 April 1916," 7.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Regierungsrat Dr. Schlottman, "Administrative Report for Sokołow and Węgrów, 10 August 1916," August 10, 1916, 38, R1501/119760, BArch.

banditry.[412]

The German occupation did, in fact, have the resources and competence to differentiate between criminals and partisans. The Central Police Station in Warsaw recognized and monitored covert political organizations and paramilitaries from the beginning of the occupation. The Government General's approach to policing and managing the threat of political subversion, particularly from the Polish Military Organization, (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* or POW) reveals much about how the military and civilian leadership of the occupation understood Polish political attitudes in 1916, and how they regarded prospects for future Polish collaboration.

The POW had evolved as the underground wing of Piłsudski's pre-war paramilitary organization. In 1909 Piłsudski had founded the Polish Riflemen's Association (*Związek Strzelecki*) in Galicia and had immediately begun organizing irregular assets in Congress Poland. These covert cells were attached to the Polish Legionary movement as a consequence of the incorporation of Piłsudski's riflemen in August 1914. The POW, as it came to be known, was initially tasked with gathering intelligence and prosecuting a campaign of sabotage against the Russian Empire to support legionary operations.[413] Though the Polish Riflemen and Legions failed to spark a widespread revolt in Congress Poland, Piłsudski managed to establish covert POW cells throughout Congress Poland before the Central Powers occupied the territory in 1915.[414] The occupation ostensibly ended the need for an anti-Russian espionage and sabotage network in Congress Poland, but Piłsudski neither demobilized the POW, nor incorporated its cells into the Polish legions. Hoping to cultivate a paramilitary force independent of Vienna, Piłsudski instead had Legionary officers to funnel new recruits into the POW.[415] They remained covert, separate from the Austrian Command structure, and personally loyal to Piłsudski.

Despite its secrecy, the GGW's leadership, military commanders, and police authorities were all perfectly aware of the POW's existence and its predominantly anti-German sympathies by the spring of 1916 *at the latest*.[416] Occupation police and military officers correctly perceived the POW as a generally anti-German organization. On 28 March 1916, *Feldpolizeikommissar* Schulze reported from his post in Warsaw that a Polish informant had confirmed the continued existence of POW cells, describing one local chapter as a "secret association" organized to militarily train Polish youth. "These", Schulze was told "were to find use as leaders of the rebels in the event of a Polish revolt".[417] After considering Schulze's report and others, the Central Police Station in Warsaw concluded that, because most Austrophiles had already joined the ranks of the Legion, the POW probably only contained Poles preparing to fight for the "unqualified independence of Poland".[418] In July 1916, Military intelligence in Warsaw summarized that they had been aware of the POW since the creation of the GGW in August 1915. They recognized Piłsudski's desire to personally control the organization, and believed that he was using the POW to "reserve" or squirrel away resources his own nationalist projects.[419] German military intelligence knew that Piłsudski's recruitment officers for the Polish Legion were discretely siphoning recruits into the POW and cited this as the reason for prohibiting Legionary recruitment in GGW territory.[420] In short, German leadership in Warsaw suspected that Piłsudski was considering the possibility of an armed struggle for national independence and had organized a paramilitary organization within the borders of the GGW.[421]

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[412] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," 6.
[413] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:381.
[414] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 28.
[415] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 138.
[416] Most intelligence reports on the POW and policy discussions on the matter appeared in March and April of 1916
[417] Feldpolizeikommissar Schulze, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 29 April 1916," April 29, 1916, 96, N30/20, BArch.
[418] Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," April 17, 1916, 99, N30/20, BArch.
[419] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," July 30, 1916, 91–92, N30/20, BArch; Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," 98.
[420] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," 91–92; Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," 98.
[421] The Polish Army Organization, "Public Declaration of the POW," July 1916, 93, N30/20, BArch.

Occupation intelligence also suspected that the POW was well organized, led by trained military personnel, and armed. Interrogations of captured POW members revealed that cells were practicing military drills, and that organizers were well versed in modern tactics.[422] GGW military intelligence found it difficult to penetrate the secrecy of the group, and consequently had no firm grasp on the number, or identities, of POW members.[423] However, they suspected that they faced several thousand paramilitaries distributed in cells across the territory and feared that the organization had seized large caches of weapons in the confusion of the Russian general retreat.[424]

Paramilitary groups would cause concern for any occupation government. Paramilitaries, rebels, and armed bandits subvert an occupation's monopoly of force and threaten its control over the territory. They can disrupt rear-staging areas and interrupt logistical support for units at the front. In the GGW, Germans faced an apparently well-equipped and centrally-led covert paramilitary pursuing an agenda contrary to their own aims. Moreover, they confronted this threat while lacking sufficient troops to guard even the most vital military infrastructure in occupied-Poland.[425] On paper, one might expect Beseler, his civilian administration, and his military governors to respond with alarm to the POW threat, to station more police in the country, to transfer responsibility to more reliable German hands, and to adopt invasive security measures to root out, dismantle, and incarcerate the subversive organization. On paper, one might expect that the existence of the POW would cause GGW personnel to question the reliability of Polish collaboration and the potential integrity of a German-Polish union.

However, occupation authorities were not especially alarmed by the presence of the POW. Its existence did not cause German officials to question the long-term reliability of the Polish population before November 1916. Of course, German authorities in Warsaw banned legionary recruitment in the GGW. However, the Government General appears to have taken few extraordinary measures to identify and detain POW members. Police investigators exercised considerable restraint when dealing with the POW. After learning of a POW cell from a former member of the organization in March 1916, *Feldpolizeikommisar* Schulze requested that the Polish informant reactivate his membership and report on the next chapter meeting. Schulze then proceeded to arrest and interrogate attendees.[426] Despite the weighty accusation of conspiracy, and Warsaw's suspicions of the POW, Schulze's punishments for those arrested were far from draconian. With the exception of the two leaders of the cell, Schulze released all of the captives on parole.[427] This is especially noteworthy considering that, only months before, Beseler had personally issued a decree threatening any subjects who committed espionage or assisted Russian forces with field court martial and execution.[428] German occupation authorities treated Polish nationalist paramilitaries as a fundamentally different, and lesser, threat than Russian espionage.

A 30 July 1916 report compiled by the Government General's military intelligence reveals that German officials held three distinct assumptions about Polish political culture which functioned to relax their concerns about the POW.[429] First, military analysts assumed that political fragmentation undermined the strength and position of the POW. That is, they wondered about the internal cohesion of the organization and the unity of purpose of its members. The POW factions had sent conflicting signals. In one declaration of objectives, POW representatives had promised to confine their area of operations to "Russian Poland" and had declared themselves ready to cooperate with the Central Powers' war effort.[430] While most of the occupations's

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[422] Feldpolizeikommissar Schulze, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 29 April 1916," 96–97.
[423] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," 92.
[424] Ibid., 91.
[425] GGW, "Minutes of the Joint Meeting of Military Governors of the GGW, 22 August 1916," August 22, 1916, 24, N30/20, BArch.
[426] Feldpolizeikommissar Schulze, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 29 April 1916," 96.
[427] Ibid., 97.
[428] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Decree on Aiding Escaping Prisoners of War," November 20, 1915, 62, N30/19, BArch. Indeed Beseler followed this a week later by circulating instructions to GGW regional authorities insisting on the rigorous application of this deterrent. Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Regulations on the Guarding of Prisoners of War," November 28, 1915, 63, N30/19, BArch.
[429] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," 91.
[430] The Polish Army Organization, "Public Declaration of the POW," 93.

intelligence pointed to the POW's anti-German sympathies, at least one former member of the organization claimed, in February 1916, that during his tenure the POW had been a purely anti-Russian instrument.[431] Evidence sufficed to convince military observers that the outwardly unified nationalist paramilitary was actually a politically multivalent group and had not yet consolidated a solidly anti-German ethos. Without this basic unity of outlook and priorities the possibility of a POW-led nationalist revolt seemed remote As of July 1916 occupation military intelligence saw a more urgent threat in the possibility that pro-Russian agents might infiltrate the POW, and redirect its energies for Petrograd's aims.[432] In short, Warsaw recognized the POW as a paramilitary organization committed to the nationalist cause, but believed that the internal politics of the group remained fluid, that members had differing views of the organization's aims, and this nationalist energy could be marshaled for multiple ends.

Even if the POW was united internally, German authorities in Warsaw still waited to see what particular national agenda Piłsudski would deploy the organization in pursuit of. In 1916, they believed it remained unclear if the POW would ultimately support an Austro-Polish solution, independence, or some other version of Polish statehood. The Government General's Central Police Station in Warsaw acknowledged the intense personal loyalty linking POW cells to the charismatic Piłsudski.[433] However, an April 1916 report filed by the Central Police administration expressed doubt as to whether Piłsudski aimed to use the POW to support an Austro-Polish solution, or if he was attempting to use his official position to tilt the Polish Legion towards the POW's stance in favor of independence.[434] While they were aware that Piłsudski favored independence and actively worked behind the GGW's back, German authorities in Warsaw still hoped that they might manipulate the POW, and bring its goals into alignment with German objectives.

Secondly, German military and police personnel believed that the POW represented a small, and ultimately marginal, faction in the political landscape of Congress Poland. The July 1916 military intelligence report estimated their strength at 8,000 members, out of the region's total population of 6 million.[435] Warsaw certainly took this as a comforting sign that Polish nationalism had stirred active commitment to a program of uncompromised independence among only a relatively small population of Polish men. The independence movement could not even muster the manpower of a German army division. With only irregular training and lacking in any sustained sources of supply, German occupation forces had little regard for the capabilities of the POW. Early intelligence reports further indicated that the POW, perhaps out of desperation for recruits, had resorted to enlisting Polish youths barely out of school.[436] Though any nationalist paramilitary threatened German control over Congress Poland to some extent, the Government General could easily interpret the POW's small size and recruitment difficulties as an encouraging sign that the cause of national independence enjoyed little active support.

Finally, German military and police authorities suspected that many members of the POW felt only weak or superficial commitment to the goal of Polish sovereignty, German officials ultimately wagered that most of the organization's rank and file would accept Polish autonomy under German leadership. Polish collaborators like Władysław Studnicki worked to reinforce this interpretation. In a memorandum submitted to the Government General in the summer of 1916, Studnicki warned German authorities to recognize the POW as evidence of Poles' widespread desire for statehood and the territorial integrity of Congress Poland.[437]

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[431] Feldpolizeikommissar Korda, "Witness Report on Activity of the POW from a Former Member, 5 February 1916," February 5, 1916, 94–95, N30/20, BArch.
[432] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," 92.
[433] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report on Political Activity in Warsaw in July 1916," August 7, 1916, 133, N30/20, BArch.
[434] Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," 99.
[435] Captain Elitze, "Intelligence Report, 'Die POW', 30 July 1916," 91–92; Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," 98; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 32.
[436] Leutnant Pokrziwnitzki, "Report from the Warsaw Polizeistelle on the POW, 17 April 1916," 98.
[437] Władysław Studnicki, "Die Vollständige Lösung der Frage der Polnischen Wehrmacht," July 1916, 108, N30/20, BArch.

However, he quickly qualified the statement, assuring the occupation that the POW was on balance more anti-Russian than anti-German, and that the organization drew its real "motive power" [*Motorkraft*] by representing the "dream of a Polish army" and Polish statehood.[438] The POW, he assured his readers, could be successfully integrated into a regular Polish national army. Studnicki did not believe that the Polish state's subordination to German leadership would compromise this integration.[439] The Central Police Station in Warsaw ultimately agreed with Studnicki's assessment. The POW's desire for independence, they concluded, could be sublimated into enthusiastic support for autonomous statehood. They predicted the creation of a Polish national army would undermine the POW, siphoning away its more moderate personnel into the ranks of the Central Powers, and eventually, a satellite army of the German military.[440]

Occupation personnel similarly believed that much of the POW's support was more representative of discontent with wartime material conditions than any hardened ideological stance. Again, Studnicki encouraged German officials to recognize the central role of wartime material poverty in driving Polish discontent.[441] To compensate for the British blockade of Central Powers' shipping, occupying troops in Poland requisitioned civilian materiel and foodstuffs for the own use. This proved especially burdensome in the highly urbanized GGW. Though he conceded their military necessity, Studnicki warned that heavy requisitions exacerbated Poles' existing distrust of Germans, and had convinced many that Berlin intended to starve and "depopulate" [*entvölkern*] the region.[442] In order to lend the process credibility and reduce the perception of exploitation, Studnicki encouraged the Government General to hand over responsibility to Polish economic mobilization to newly formed "Polish institutions" of governance.[443]

The measures actually adopted by the Government General of Warsaw in 1916 to counter the POW confirm that the German Occupation overall understood Polish commitment to national independence to be a marginal position, weakly held, and manifesting social frustration more than ideological commitment. GGW efforts therefore focused on improving civilian welfare as much as wartime conditions would allow and reinforcing local German-Polish collaboration. In communications with Berlin and the OHL Beseler counseled measures to restrict POW recruitment, but proposed no grand campaign to root the organization out. In his 2 August 1916 report to Falkenhayne, for instance, Beseler resisted OHL's proposal to create a voluntary German-Polish legion. Any military formation not closely tied to Warsaw risked being infiltrated by the POW, increasingly under the influence of "radical-nationalistic" and "questionable" elements tied to Piłsudski.[444]

Shortly thereafter, on 22 August 1916, the military governors of the GGW conferred to coordinate their action against the problem of armed unrest. Tellingly, the military governors confronted the POW as a subset of the broader problem of armed criminality and "banditry", which they considered a manifestation of economic, rather than ideological, discontent.[445] That is, the assembled governors easily conflated the nationalist paramilitary and armed criminals, and believed that recruitment for the POW and banditry were driven by the same conditions of material poverty and social disaffection.[446] The current occupation, they worried, offered fertile ground for criminality and unrest. In addition to chronic food shortages, they estimated that

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[438] Ibid., 109.
[439] Ibid.; Władysław Studnicki, "Institutions in the Transitional Stage," July 1916, 119, N30/20, BArch. In the document in question, German Suzerainty is implied, not stated, but Studnicki's previous and ongoing communication with the Government General make it clear that Studnicki operated under the assumption of, and even preferred, German leadership in the future.
[440] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report for July 1916," 135.
[441] Studnicki, "Institutions in the Transitional Stage," 110.
[442] Ibid., 110–11.
[443] Ibid., 111.
[444] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to Falkenhayn and Bethmann Hollweg, 2 August 1916," August 2, 1916, 14, N30/10, BArch.
[445] GGW, "Minutes of the Joint Meeting of Military Governors of the GGW, 22 August 1916," 21–28.
[446] Ibid., 24–25.

86,000 residents in the occupation were currently unemployed.[447] The governors identified unemployment and hunger as the main driver of both banditry and paramilitary activity and the main threat to the stability of the occupation.[448]

Perceiving banditry and paramilitarism as manifestations of social anomie, the military governors proposed mainly social remedies. Reducing the unemployment rate was their first priority for subverting resistance.[449] The governors suggested that Warsaw and Berlin coordinate as a sort of employment agency, offering unemployed Poles open positions in Germany.[450] They further proposed that the central occupation administration in Warsaw take on a greater role as an employment facilitator and public works employer. Warsaw and local civilian administrators should directly employ more of the population in sanitation and temporary farm-work.[451] They also called upon Warsaw to solicit the regional *Kreischefs* to identify their own priorities for infrastructure and public works projects, as well as their available resources.[452] The jobs generated by this initiative to rebuild and develop the Government General, the military governors believed, would prevent Polish men from resorting to banditry to maintain themselves, and alleviate the sense of anger and frustration that was pushing youth towards the nationalist POW.[453] "We want to show", they agreed, "that we don't only know how to forbid and requisition, but rather also how to help. And we want to show the Poles that we want to develop [the region]".[454]

The assembled governors naturally proposed new measures to shore up security in the short-term, but their recommendations relied upon increasing collaboration with Polish police personnel. In particular, the conference called for closer and more regular collaboration between the German cavalry (employed as a mobile police force) and municipal police.[455] They further suggested cultivating closer ties with the Polish clergy, whether to access local information networks or improve the occupation's image. Finally, the governors recommended deterring banditry by arming local Polish night-watches [*Ortsnachtwachen*] with shotguns.[456] They considered close regulation of ammunition supplies sufficient to ensure that the firearms would be used for only official police purposes.

The military governors were ultimately responsible for regional security and order in the GGW. That their first instinct to improve local security was to better equip local Polish police confirms two important details about how the German occupation understood Polish nationalism in relation to German control. First, the GGW worried more about the potential for rising criminality than the existence of a covert paramilitary organizing to challenge German authority. Banditry seemed more urgent, potentially disruptive, and harmful to the occupation's mission than the relatively small POW. Secondly, the German authorities trusted that the POW was marginal enough that they were willing to actively supply local Polish police with firearms, trusting that these would not be used against the German occupiers in the future.

The POW did not seriously challenge German authorities' belief that Poles could be relied upon to loyally serve and reliably defend a future autonomous Polish state and its German Suzerain. Military commanders and civilian police both believed that the POW numerically small and internally divided. They believed the overtly anti-German elements within the POW to lack ideological commitment, and argued that the German Empire could undercut paramilitary recruitment and win over much of the Polish population with intelligent occupation policies. Officials therefore sought to ingratiate themselves with influential cultural elites, like the Roman Catholic episcopate, and improve material conditions in the region to the extent possible in wartime. Their strategy for directly confronting the POW emphasized improving collaboration

[447] Ibid., 25.
[448] Ibid., 24.
[449] Ibid., 27.
[450] Ibid., 25. This is distinct from the Hindenburg Program's more compulsory mobilization.
[451] Ibid., 26.
[452] Ibid., 27.
[453] Ibid., 25.
[454] Ibid., 27.
[455] Ibid., 28.
[456] Ibid.

with a more capable Polish police force. While they did not consider Poles by and large friendly to Berlin, the military and police personnel responsible for the occupation believed that German policy could manipulate and shape Polish nationalism, and gradually cultivate a productive German-Polish relationship.

The GGW therefore implemented press policies intended to reshape the narratives and sympathies of Polish nationalism, especially in a Russophobic direction. Germans hoped that collaboration would be motivated by Poles' recognition that Poland shared an enemy with Germany and that Poland would profit from strategic cooperation with the German Empire to defend Eastern Europe against a future Russian attack. Poles who resented Petrograd's decades of repressive Polish policy stoked the belief among occupation authorities that Polish nationalism was potentially more anti-Russian, than anti-German in content. Already in September 1915, one Count Eduard Krasinski petitioned Beseler on behalf of the Monument Preservation Society in the Kingdom of Poland to dismantle an offensive Russian monument on Zielony Plac, which honored 7 Polish officers who had refused to mutiny against the Russian Empire in 1830.[457]Even before the establishment of the GGW, occupation authorities had coordinated with Erzberger's office on *Budapesterstraße* to encourage Russophobic expressions of Polish nationalism. This policy continued and expanded under the GGW. Beseler's archivist Adolf Warschauer, for instance, actively provided archival material for Polish organized exhibitions glorifying the revolt of 1863, and castigating Russia's brutal and enduring crackdown on Polish culture.[458]

In combination with an astute choice to loosen censorship on native press, this policy seemed to bear fruit. German authorities perceived antipathy to the Russian Empire as an increasingly dominant theme within Polish nationalist discourse. In the public sphere, local theaters performed patriotic plays. The brutality of Russian rule and Polish insurrections against it were especially popular themes.[459] On 16 January 1916, the multinationalist historian Ignaz Jastrow sent a new report to Beseler, detailing his recent conversation with a prominent factory owner in Warsaw. The industrialist had apparently assured Jastrow that the occupation had actually overestimated the extent to which Congress Poles felt loyalty or even practical sympathy for the Russian Empire.[460] The GGW, the factory-owner had pointed out, had established most of its working relationships with prominent elites, whose economic interests and fear of land-reform had generally bound them closely to the Tsar before the war.[461] Moreover, he claimed that German censorship had incidentally silenced anti-Russian nationalists, by preventing open discussion of Polish statehood.[462] According to Jastrow, the industrialist had concluded by assuring him that the creation of a Polish state would induce Poles to finally take up arms against the hated Russian Empire, claiming that Warsaw could quickly mobilize a million-man army to march against Petrograd.[463] By the summer, Polish collaborators had only become more vocal. In July 1916, one sympathetic Polish nationalist sent a memorandum to the GGW, insisting upon Polish claims for autonomy, but conceding that Poland would be in no position to create and defend an independent state on its own. Conforming to German expectations, the collaborator suggested that the mutual interests of the German Empire and the Polish nation lay in the creation of a multinationalist German-Polish union.[464]

Indeed, GGW officials in Warsaw considered their position especially advantageous in the summer of 1916. The apparent susceptibility of Polish society to German influence was bulwarked by growing dissatisfaction in Poland with Austro-Hungarian economic and military

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[457] Eduard Krasinski and Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Antrag der Denkmalpflege-Gesellschaft im Königreich Polen," September 22, 1915, 58, N30/19, BArch.
[458] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 51.
[459] Ibid., 50.
[460] Ignaz Jastrow, "Letter to Governor General von Beseler, 16 December 1916," December 16, 1916, 2, N30/35, BArch.
[461] Ibid.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Ibid., 8.
[464] Felix von Beczkowicz, "Die polnische Frage vom Gesichtspunkte der deutschen Interessen im Zusammenhang mit der russischen Gefahr," July 28, 1916, 109–14, N30/35, BArch.

performance. The economic burden of German occupation was by no means light, and requisitions of timber, draught animals, forage, and food supplies weighed heavily on the population of the GGW. Residents received lower rations than their civilian counterparts in Germany, and food shortages were chronic.[465] However, residents of the GGL fared comparatively worse. Though Cisleithanian officials garnered some sympathy among the population, Hungarian guards were considered brutal. Due to the agrarian focus of the local economy, Austria-Hungary experienced considerably greater difficulty recruiting laborers for war industries, and therefore soon resorted to compulsory labor.[466] Many residents fled into the woods to escape labor dragooning.[467] German labor recruitment, which offered substantially higher wages, actually siphoned workers from the GGL until German recruitment was officially limited to the GGW in 1916.[468] The embarrassing performance of the Austro-Hungarian army in holding the line against General Aleksei Brusilov's June offensive, followed by the German Empire's success in reinforcing and finally halting the breakthrough, had vibrantly demonstrated the comparative military strength of the Central Powers. In its wake, German authorities in Warsaw believed that a growing number of Poles preferred German sponsorship or suzerainty to incorporation into an increasingly feeble Habsburg state.[469]

German faith in the possibility, popularity, and dependability of future Polish collaboration was further buoyed by the existence, and evidently growing influence, of an overtly collaborationist party in Congress Poland. Already on 10 August 1915, Władysław Studnicki, had introduced himself in a personal letter to Beseler as a "Polish writer of anti-Russian disposition", who had realized that Poland's future prosperity was dependent both upon Germany's victory in the war and the "future cooperation" of Poles and Germans in the reconstruction of Europe.[470]He immediately offered his services writing anti-Russian propaganda for the German occupation.[471] Studnicki would gradually emerge as the leading voice of the pro-German wing of the 'activist' political parties in Congress Poland. Its core members would included influential Polish activists and members of the prominent aristocratic families, who favored the "closest union" with Germany and spoke of the need for German protection to support Poland's future "inner development".[472] This faction gradually developed into a party vocally committed to Polish statehood, liberation from Russia, and participation in the present war as a Central Power. In the summer of 1916, Studnicki drafted a new memorandum for the German administration in Warsaw, arguing that Poles would resist any resolution of the Polish question other than the creation of a Polish state under a Polish King.[473] Yet, he continued, if Germany created such a state, it would spark Polish enthusiasm for the war against Russia across Eastern Europe, and Poles would flock to join a Polish national army.[474] Studnicki wrote ambiguously about Poland's future relationship to the German Empire, but hinted that Warsaw's subordination to Berlin's leadership could be amenable to Polish interests.[475]

From May to June of 1916, Beseler and Kries together sponsored the creation of an official "Club of the Supporters of Polish Statehood" [*Klub der Anhänger des Polnischen*

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[465] Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation," 100–102.
[466] Ibid., 93.
[467] Ibid.
[468] Ibid.
[469] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report for July 1916," 134.
[470] Władysław Studnicki, "Letter of Introduction to Governor General von Beseler, 10 August 1915," August 10, 1915, 23–24, N30/19, BArch.
[471] Ostmarkenverein, "Haltung der Polen in Posen während der ersten 13. Kriegswochen," 24.
[472] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Bethmann Hollweg, 25 September 1916," September 25, 1916, 47, N30/13, BArch; von der Ropp, "Letter to Governor General von Beseler, 9 October 1916," October 9, 1916, 9, N30/21, BArch.
[473] Studnicki, "Die Vollständige Lösung der Frage der Polnischen Wehrmacht," 108–9.
[474][474] Studnicki's estimate's for this army were comparatively conservative. He guessed a Polish state could recruit or conscript roughly 500,000 men. Ibid., 102–3.
[475] Ibid., 105.

Staatswesens] under the leadership of Studnicki.[476] Over the summer, the party publicly agitated in favor of a German-sponsored Polish state, understanding that this would require Warsaw's permanent dependence upon the German Empire. On 5 August 1916, the Club publically called for an autonomous Polish state, "to remain most intimately bound with our liberator in perpetuity".[477] The Club's statement clarified that the mutual defense of Germany and Poland from the Russian Empire practically demanded a German-Polish union.

> We wish for a lasting and constitutionally-inscribed [*verfassungsmässiges*] alliance with the German Empire and we are prepared, to bear the same military burdens for the defense of Poland's freedoms as the allies of the Poles. The German Kaiser shall be entitled to [Poland's] international representation and the supreme command of the Polish army in the event of war. He might supervise the formation [*Ausbildung*] of the army and the construction of fortifications, and for these purposes nominate German military advisors and inspectors. The German Kaiser alone shall have the right to mobilize the Polish army and deploy it in the event of war according to his discretion.[478]

The emergence of a native-grown Polish collaborationist party, which so overtly supported the grand-strategic bargain at the heart of the multinational imperial model, only confirmed the suspicions of Beseler and his subordinates that Polish nationalists could be trusted to faithfully serve the German Empire in the future. In September 1916, Studnicki proudly boasted of the growing influence of his Club, and reported that a recent gathering had attracted an audience of 5,000 sympathizers. Beseler interpreted this as evidence of the "day to day" growth in the number of Congress Poles who both perceived the Russian Empire as Poland's greatest threat, and recognized the value of German leadership for securing their own national goals.[479]

Though occupation authorities were heartened by the apparent growth of Polish sympathy for the German Empire, they never diluted themselves into believing that the majority of the Polish population desired German suzerainty, or even trusted their German occupiers. Throughout 1915 and 1916, Beseler doubted that Congress Poles sympathized with the German Empire. He nonetheless believed that the Polish political landscape was fractured and unstable enough to invite effective German influence over time.[480] In January 1916, Beseler complained that, unlike in the German occupation zone, the Austrian presence in the Government General of Lublin was tolerated, or even welcomed by the local population. Congress Poles, he remarked, largely associated the German occupiers with Prussia's longstanding Germanization efforts.[481] Whether members of the passivist *Endecja*, or supporters of independent statehood in the activist *PPS*, Beseler admitted that most parties and politically active Congress Poles tended to dislike, or even express open hostility to the German Empire.[482] The Governor General further conceded that many prominent Polish nationalists still considered the 'reclamation' of the German *Ostmark* a central national priority. They simply refused to accept that Berlin would never relinquish these territories.[483] In April 1916, Beseler further noted that, while politically active Poles obviously desired an "autonomous Polish state", few showed any "sympathy for Germany" [*Deutschfreundlichkeit*]. The growing antipathy for the Russian Empire in Polish political

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[476] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report on the Petition of the "Anhänger Des Polnischen Staatswesens", 12 May 1916," May 12, 1916, 60–62, N30/20, BArch.
[477] Władysław Studnicki, "Open Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler and the German Imperial Government from Polish Representatives, 5 August 1916," August 5, 1916, 121, N30/20, BArch.
[478] Ibid.
[479] GGW, "Report on Public Assembly of the 'Klub Der Anhänger Des Polnischen Staatswesens,'" September 1916, 5, N30/13, BArch; Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to the Chancellor, 5 September 1916," September 5, 1916, 6, N30/13, BArch.
[480] von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 29 January 1916," 8.
[481] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Immediatbericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen vom 23. Jan. 1916," January 23, 1916, 52, N30/9, BArch.
[482] Ibid., 53.
[483] Ibid., 55.

society, he noted, was perhaps improving Germany's position, but had not yet fundamentally altered Polish sympathies.[484] Even the organization of Studnicki's pro-German Club in the Summer did not convince the German occupation authorities. As of August 1916, Beseler and the GGW remained unimpressed with the Club's broader popularity, and certainly did not believe that Studnicki represented the majority, plurality, or even strong minority of the Polish population.[485] Indeed, the Club admitted in its communications with the GGW that only a relatively small minority of Congress Poles sympathized with their position.[486]

The authorities in the GGW therefore never presumed that the majority of the Polish population already either supported, or would presently tolerate, German suzerainty. However, Beseler and his subordinates became increasingly convinced that the German Empire would be able to manipulate key Polish elites to accept the grand bargain of autonomy for suzerainty. These elites, the German occupation concluded, would effectively mobilize reliable mass support for a German-Polish union. Much like contemporary multinationalist publicists, the GGW ultimately subscribed to a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism. Internal reports on the political atmosphere of Congress Poland therefore identified possible avenues and strategies for winning influence among Polish elites. Though historically loyal to the Tsar, German observers noted that many Polish nobles worried about the arbitrariness of the Russian autocracy, and had seen many of their comrades stripped of their land after 1863.[487] They further estimated that landowners would gradually accept German patronage as a substitute for Tsarism, fearful that a completely independent Poland would facilitate a demagogic program of land reform. German analysts noted that the peasantry, though largely loyal to the Russian Tsar, were strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic clergy.[488] Close relations with the episcopate might secure the support of this key demographic for German leadership. Finally, though much of the urban middle class leaned to the anti-German *Endecja*, observers emphasized that this class had also incited and strongly supported the revolt of 1863. Russophobia, they hoped, might once again come to dominate their nationalist agenda, and shape it towards German ends.[489] The upshot was, that German occupation authorities believed that it could gradually develop support for a German-Polish union among specific classes of influential Polish elites by positioning itself as a defender of property against autocratic caprice and demotic avarice, a defender of Roman Catholicism against Orthodoxy, and a defender of national autonomy against Russification.

Indeed, even those few Poles who explicitly supported the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty argued that the close management and manipulation of Polish elites would be necessary to direct Polish national sentiment into pro-German channels. Collaborators thus strongly encouraged Germany to grant any new Polish state a "colonization territory" east of the Bug, primarily as a means of buying Polish sympathies for Berlin.[490] Studnicki himself admitted that collaborationists were a minority within the Polish public and therefore proposed a number of concrete measures to sway public sentiment in the future.[491] Warsaw, he suggested, should sequester the property of magnates who had fled to Russia, and thereby discourage loyalism. He recommended handing over positions of responsibility in the future Polish administration to carefully vetted members of the Polish intelligentsia, selected for their fidelity to the Central Powers. Upon the establishment of a state, the Polish Interior Ministry would need to launch a propagandistic press policy, compelling even passivist newspapers to celebrate statehood and stoke a "war fanfare". Finally, Studnicki believed that carefully packing local governments with activist district chiefs would gradually nudge the masses of the country in a pro-German direction.[492]

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[484] von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 20 April 1916," 5.
[485] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report for July 1916," 134.
[486] Studnicki, "Institutions in the Transitional Stage," 113–15.
[487] GGW, "Das Parteiwesen in Kongresspolen," 2.
[488] Ibid., 3.
[489] Ibid.
[490] Studnicki, "Open Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler," 122.
[491] Studnicki, "Institutions in the Transitional Stage," 113–15.
[492] Ibid.

All of these key perceptions (the local absence of violent resistance, the evident political disunity of the Polish political landscape, the apparent possibility of Polish national collaboration with the German Empire, and the plausibility of effectively manipulating Polish political elites) were firmly established among occupation administrators by January 1916. As will be discussed below, they had also already begun to shape GGW policies. In May 1916, two events in Congress Poland dramatically reinforced the belief within the occupation regime that Polish national sentiment was developing a sympathetic disposition towards the German Empire. On 3 May 1916, already confident that Polish nationalist discourse was defined more by Russophobic than anti-German sentiment, Beseler gambled by permitting Varsovians to celebrate the promulgation of the 1791 constitution.[493] The 1791 constitution, actually represented the ideal nationalist symbol for a multinational German-Polish union. Among its celebrated reforms to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Great Sejm had elected to replace the fractious elected monarchy with a hereditary monarchy, which would pass to the Saxon Wettin dynasty under Elector Friedrich August III.[494] In other words, the holiday offered the GGW the perfect national symbol, one that fêted Polish liberty, even as it could be infiltrated with messages celebrating historic links to German Central Europe. On the day, Beseler publically celebrated the 1791 constitution as a great European accomplishment.[495] He also took the opportunity to warn his Polish audience to be careful to seek what was politically "achievable". Secession, he clarified, was sometimes impossible, and in some cases, the welfare of a nation demanded "joining with other states".[496] But Beseler stressed his administrations' desire to facilitate the free development of Polish national culture. He otherwise refrained from interfering in the celebration.[497]

The 3 May 1916 saw massive patriotic demonstrations throughout the streets of Warsaw. The anti-Russian tone of demonstrations, the peaceable behavior of the crowds towards occupation officials, and the reception of Beseler's speech, all made a deep impression on occupation officials. Overall, the celebrations of 3 May fortified two key assumptions about Polish national politics. First, it reinforced the claim that anti-Russian sentiment prevailed in Polish nationalist discourse. Second, it suggested the receptiveness of the population to friendly collaboration with the German Empire. German sympathizers like Władysław Studnicki sent notes of gratitude to the administration in Warsaw, and reiterated their desire for a Polish states as the "defensive wall of *Mitteleuropa*" in the East.[498] GGW leadership observed the festivities carefully, and took them as evidence that Polish nationalist discourse was developing according to their assumptions. Kries happily reported to State Secretary Delbrück, that now, even Cisleithanian Polish supporters of the Austro-Polish solution were concerned by Germany's growing popularity in Congress Poland.[499] Beseler described 3 May as "evidence for the successful efficacy of the German administration" in Congress Poland, and he looked forward to the continued decay of Russian loyalism in the local population, and the related growth of Pro-German sentiment.[500] In particular, Beseler considered Studnicki's political organization a step in the right direction.[501] More convinced than ever of Polish pliability to German designs, Beseler circulated a political report among his military governors on 10 May 1916.[502] Therein, Beseler reiterated that Piłsudski's PPS was a suspect nationalist party, but now believed that it might eventually accept "dependence" upon the Central Powers. Indeed, Beseler argued that "wide

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[493] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 47.
[494] Larry Wolff, "The Traveler's View of Central Europe: Gradual Transitions and Degrees of Difference in European Borderlands," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 26.
[495] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Speech on the Occassion of 3 May 1916," May 3, 1916, 55, N30/20, BArch.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid.
[498] Władysław Studnicki, "Letter to Governor General von Beseler, May 1916," May 1916, 53, N30/20, BArch.
[499] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report to the State Secretary of the RAI, 4 May 1916," May 4, 1916, 74–75, R1501/119790, BArch.
[500] von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 22 July 1916," 21.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Political Report Distributed to the Military Governments, 10 May 1916," May 10, 1916, 57, N30/20, BArch.

classes of this group" were apparently beginning to favor "dependence" upon the German Empire specifically.[503] Beseler therefore instructed his governors to no longer discourage PPS activities or handle the party as a provocative element.[504] Confident in Germany's growing prestige in Congress Poland, the German occupation would attempt to incorporate Piłsudski's faction into the ranks of active supporters for a German-Polish union.

A further episode in 1916 reinforced the German view that few Poles actually felt committed enough to independence to actively resist the occupation. On 13 May, Varsovian streetcar workers began a city-wide strike, primarily demanding higher wages from the Polish municipal government.[505] Given the tram's public importance, Warsaw's German-administered police presidium quickly began mediating negotiations between demonstrating workers and the directors of the service. Judging the workers' demands reasonable, and their employers' recalcitrance unjustified, the police presidium opted to temporarily assume responsibility for the streetcars, and granted the demands of the strike.[506] Rather than resume operation, however, the strike had continued and workers had submitted new demands. Kries suspected that "political agitators" were to blame for this renewed strike.[507] Concession having failed, the police presidium now detained strike leaders and threatened further arrests until the strike dissolved.[508]

Though ultimately broken by coercion, occupation officials interpreted the episode as further evidence of the susceptibility of Polish society to German influence. Rather than perceive the politicization of the strike as an ominous warning of anti-German mobilization, Kries emphasized that the "predominant share of the Polish Press" had supported the position of the occupation government and had encouraged the demonstrators to resume work after the initial wage concessions.[509] While initially sympathetic to the demonstrators' grievances, Kries noted that public sentiment had immediately turned against the strike after the GGW had met their demands. Indeed, the public had largely supported the police presidium's "sharp measures" to finally break the strike and restore streetcar service to the city.[510] Beseler likewise saw the event as the only major political disruption of note for the second quarter of 1916. He attributed the striker's initial resistance to agitation by "international socialists", and not to disgruntled Polish nationalists.[511] Taken together, the festivities on the 3 May, and the streetcar strike of mid-May, appeared to confirm to German occupation officials that Congress Poles would enthusiastically support Polish statehood, but were otherwise disinclined to resist a reasonably benevolent German occupation. Both events suggested that Polish nationalist discourse could be manipulated by intelligent German policy.

However, even at this highest pitch of occupiers' confidence, the GGW never presumed that the majority of Congress Poles actually desired German suzerainty. The optimism of Beseler and his subordinates was always future-oriented, and rooted in their confidence in the German Empire's ability to manipulate Polish nationalist elites, who would in turn secure the fidelity of the Polish masses. In the Summer of 1916, Georg Cleinow, the GGW's authority on Polish political sentiment, still perceived daunting obstacles to engineering Polish support for German suzerainty. As noted above, Cleinow believed that most in Poland nurtured lingering loyalties for the Tsar or Pan-Slavism. He warned that *Endecja*'s anti-German nationalism authentically represented major sectors of Polish opinion, though it did not monopolize Polish discourse. Cleinow warned that many in Congress Poland still disdained the "rapacious" and "untrustworthy" Prussians and blamed Berlin for its perceived attempts to achieve the "complete

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[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid., 58.
[505] von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," 6.
[506] Ibid., 7.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid.
[509] Ibid.
[510] Ibid.
[511] von Beseler, "Report on the Administration of the GGW, 22 July 1916," 21.

eradication" of Polish culture via Germanization.[512] The close financial and trade relationships between the Russian Empire and Congress Poland, Cleinow reiterated, only bulwarked these traditional loyalties.[513]

Nonetheless, Cleinow argued that German policy could successfully manipulate Polish national elites in the long term, and build Polish loyalty to a German-Polish union based upon the advantage of collective security.[514] To combat both Russophilia and the allure of the socialist independence movement, Cleinow believed that the German Empire would need to adopt a set of policies designed to woo moderate conservative elites, the Roman Catholic Church, and key Polish nationalists. Germany could secure the fidelity of Congress Poles, he concluded, if it encouraged the "development of the conservative state-strengthening elements of the Polish nation": the Church, the Christian labor-unions, and property-holders.[515] If Berlin secure the loyalty of these elite opinion-makers, Cleinow believed the fidelity of the Polish masses would soon follow. By June 1916, Kries was actually more optimistic. He agreed with much of Cleinow's analysis, though he actually believed the Press Chief had overestimated Polish sympathies for the Russian Empire. In short, Kries too believed that the German Empire could secure the loyalty of the Polish masses with discrete political interventions.[516]

Having concluded that the German Empire could reasonably hope to secure reliable Polish collaboration, both the Governor General, and many of his subordinates began to promote the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, along familiar multinationalist lines. Beseler first sketched a rough outline for a dependent Polish state in his official report of October 1915.[517] Already, Beseler began to articulate his preference for a Polish state, with political and cultural autonomy, though effectively controlled by Berlin.[518] Beseler agreed that, if successful, the scheme would achieve Germany's strategic priorities by essentially shortening the empire's eastern border, while perhaps avoiding confrontation with Polish nationalists.[519] Relying as it did on the assumption that Poland could be trusted not to betray the German Empire, Beseler's proposal demonstrates that Beseler very quickly concluded that Polish national sentiment was vulnerable to German manipulation. It is also possible that Beseler was inspired, perhaps even pressured, by the Deputy General Staff's recent memorandum.[520]

Beseler had become firmer in his conviction by 1916. On 23 January, Beseler's official report to the Kaiser clearly recommended the creation of a Polish state under German suzerainty.[521] The Governor General warned that every alternative solution promised catastrophe for the German Empire. Partition would only "sharpen" Polish nationalist agitation, and incite perpetual unrest and instability within Germany. Dissatisfied Poles would either revolt or conspire with Germany's rivals.[522] Congress Poles tenacious resistance to Russification, Beseler reminded his reader, demonstrated their irresistible will for political autonomy, even as it demonstrated the Polish nation's "right to existence".[523] The German Empire neither should, nor could, repress this. An Austro-Polish solution, Beseler allowed, might be tolerable, if Germany also annexed Suwałki, the Grodno-Bobr-Narew line up to Modlin, and the left bank of the Vistula around Plock, Kalisz, and Czestachowa.[524] Yet, even with such vast annexations, Beseler argued that an Austro-Polish solution would still breed regional instability and rivalry between Berlin and Vienna. He therefore urgently pressed Berlin to support his efforts to block any

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[512] Georg Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," June 14, 1916, 56–58, N30/35, BArch.
[513] Ibid., 54, 74.
[514] Ibid., 47, 73.
[515] Ibid., 81.
[516] Ibid., 46.
[517] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 40–41.
[518] Ibid., 41–42.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Stellvertretender Generalstab, Zeitungstelle, "Polen: Ergebnisse der Pressabeobachtung," 87–108.
[521] von Beseler, "Beselers Immediatbericht, 23 Januar 1916," 52.
[522] Ibid., 57.
[523] Ibid., 56.
[524] Ibid., 57.

expansion of Vienna's influence in the GGW, especially via legionary recruitment.[525]

The German Empire's interests, Beseler summarized, "demand not only the extension of our defensive-border to the east, but also the creation of an absolutely reliable stately-entity from the territory carved from the Russian Empire, and the relentless exploitation of its considerable military resources".[526] German security, Beseler continued, would be best served by the "incorporation" of a Polish state "into our military system through an inviolable military convention" constituting a "defensive wall" against Russia.[527] The Governor General still supported limited annexations in northern Congress Poland, namely along the Narew-Bobr line.[528] However, Beseler otherwise prioritized the creation of a militarily and economically strong Poland. His report was saturated with concern for the "militarily potency of Poland" [*Militärische Leistungsfähigkeit Polens*].[529] In particular, Beseler supported the addendum of significant White Ruthenian territory to the future Polish state.[530]

Beseler insisted that Poland was a civilized nation, and indeed framed Poland's future role as the defender of the occident against the "*Unkultur*" of the Russian Empire.[531] Recognizing the cultural draw and integrity of Polish nationhood, Beseler concluded that Polish autonomy and German suzerainty represented the only solution that could secure German interests without provoking violent and massive Polish resistance.[532] Yet he was optimistic that Poles would eventually regard German suzerainty as legitimate as long as Germany could plausibly present its leadership as supporting the "renewal" and "liberation" of the Polish nation.[533] Too small to survive on its own, Beseler believed that Poland would necessarily attach itself as a "subservient branch" to another European power.[534] The German Empire, he insisted, could step into the role of Poland's national patron, but only if Prussia dismantled its Germanization policy.[535]

If Berlin could convince Polish elites that the German Empire would defend and sponsor Polish nationhood, Beseler argued that Germany need not fear Polish resistance or subversion. Though Polish nationalists wanted autonomy, Beseler's January report emphasized that the political landscape was otherwise fractured and malleable to German ends.[536] Although some elements expressed hostility to the German state, and though Congress Poland lacked any strong pro-German party, Beseler reported that the majority of the Polish population, especially the peasantry, remained "politically indifferent".[537]The nobility, he continued, had proven similarly ambivalent. Though many wanted statehood, others had grown comfortable with Petrograd's rule, and still more remained undecided. Beseler assured the Kaiser that careful policy could secure their loyalty to a German-Polish union against the Russian Empire.[538] Finally, Beseler believed that the urban population and middle classes of Congress Poland, though more inclined to espouse nationalist ideology, also harbored deeper grievances against the Russian Empire, and could thus be convinced of the virtue of union with the German Empire.[539]

In a 2 March 1916 report, Beseler reaffirmed his commitment to a German-Polish union, and began pressing Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg to begin negotiations with Vienna to secure their divestment from Congress Poland. Beseler insisted that Vienna must renounce its claims to Congress Poland publicly, so that Poles would see that they had no alternative but to collaborate

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[525] Ibid., 54–57.
[526] Ibid., 55.
[527] Ibid., 55–56.
[528] Ibid., 56.
[529] Ibid., 54.
[530] Ibid., 55.
[531] Ibid., 53, 58.
[532] Ibid., 56.
[533] Ibid., 54.
[534] Ibid., 55.
[535] Ibid., 52.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid., 53–55.
[538] Ibid., 53.
[539] Ibid.

with the German Empire.[540] In a 22 April letter to the Chancellor, Beseler strongly reiterated his preference for an "autonomous" Polish state under German suzerainty, or at least a Polish state incorporated into a German-led Central European Confederation.[541] After the triumphant experiences of May, Beseler again pressured the Kaiser and Chancellor, this time emphasizing the advantage of expanding the Polish state deep into White Ruthenia.[542]

Over the Spring of 1916, the military and political apparatus of the GGW likewise began promoting a multinational imperial model for Poland.[543] Many were convinced by the logic of multinational imperialism and worked actively for this objective. The "foundation of a Kingdom of Poland, that is bound to the German Empire through a state-treaty and fundamental components of its constitution" became the foundational aim of occupation authorities, and the lodestar of GGW policy.[544] Like Beseler, many occupation authorities considered annexations in the Northwest, including Suwałki and part of Łomża, necessary for German security. But German officials likewise believed that Polish society would bear these concessions, as they were mostly densely forested and thinly populated swamplands.[545] Most otherwise opposed large annexations for fear of provoking nationalist outrage and resistance in Poland.[546] Indeed, GGW officials agreed that large annexations would most likely burden the German-Polish relationship with a "mortgage it could not bear", and introduce a "germ of discord" that would ultimately subvert German security in the region.[547] Functionaries like Georg Cleinow were especially resistant to proposals to secure annexations through German colonization, arguing that this would only instigate new frictions with the indigenous population.[548]

Occupation functionaries therefore began to flesh out the design of a future German-Polish union. In broad strokes, GGW officials agreed that a union should be based upon a permanent alliance, Berlin's control of joint foreign policy and wartime military command, and some form of economic integration. The constitutional structure of a German-Polish union particularly interested Cleinow, who felt that a Poland, "bound in a fixed real union with Prussia", represented the "best guarantee", that the Polish national idea would serve German interests, rather than those of Russia or other foreign powers.[549] Poland, he clarified, would be bound to Berlin by articles inscribed in both the German and Polish constitutions.[550] Cleinow insisted that the permanent alliance between the German and Polish armies would more than adequately defend the German Empire's eastern frontier, without requiring the annexation of considerable Polish territory to Prussia.[551]

The gradual articulation of a German-Polish union reflected the deeply federalist assumptions at the core of GGW thinking. Cleinow celebrated the grand bargain foundational to the German-Polish union. The Polish state and the Polish national army, he wrote, would defend Eastern Europe alongside the German armies, whilst also "guaranteeing the cultural autonomy of the Poles".[552] The logic of the grand bargain closely mirrored the federal narrative of the German Empire's own legitimacy. Indeed as German occupation personnel filled in the constitutional details of a proposed union, they frequently advocating the incorporation of the Kingdom of Poland into existing German federal structures. One internal proposal suggested that Warsaw be granted representation on the *Bundesrat*, roughly in proportion to its population and strategic

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[540] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "'Reinkonzept' Sent to the Chancellor, 2 March 1916," March 2, 1916, 29–33, N30/12, BArch.
[541] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellor, 22 April 1916," April 22, 1916, 49, N30/12, BArch.
[542] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 44–45.
[543] Wolfgang von Kries, "'Aufzeichnung über ihm vorschwebende Zukunftsmöglichkeiten für Polen' in 'Polen: Zusammenstellung aus der Akten der Reichskanzlei,'" March 7, 1916, 19–20, NL Jagow 3, PA AA.
[544] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Aufzeichnung der polnischen Frage," 1916, 121, R1501/119670, BArch.
[545] Ibid., 123.
[546] Ibid., 122.
[547] Ibid., 121.
[548] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 81.
[549] Ibid., 46, 77–78, 86, 92–94.
[550] Ibid., 82–83.
[551] Ibid., 81.
[552] Ibid., 46, 77–78.

importance.[553] In March 1916, Kries pondered a highly federal incorporation of Poland, suggesting that the new Kingdom might be granted 60 representatives to the *Reichstag* to vote on common economic issues. He even also providing Warsaw with 6 *Bundesrat* representatives to vote on common imperial questions, including discussions over declarations of war.[554]

Consideration of candidates for the Polish throne was similarly deeply entangled with federal dynastic politics and the constitutional balance of power in the German Empire. Occupation personnel concluded that Polish religious sentiment dictated a Catholic royal dynasty. Policy-makers considered a Catholic Hohenzollern prince, as well as branches of the Württemberg and Wettin lines to be viable candidates.[555] The Wettin dynasty, had the advantage of historical claim. The Saxon Elector Friedrich August had converted to Catholicism in 1697 to facilitate his election as King August II of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[556] The Wettins' royal tenures had been marred by disastrous wars, which had sapped both Polish and Saxon strength, before finally ending in 1763.[557] Still, the constitution of 1791 had designated the Wettin line as the dynasty to assume the hereditary kingship of a reformed Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Under Napoleonic stewardship, the Wettins again briefly held the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in personal-union.[558] Notably absent, from the list of candidates, was the German Empire's most powerful Catholic dynasty. The Wittelsbach line of Bavaria was rarely submitted for consideration. Uniting Poland in personal union with Bavaria would have also threatened to unbalance the federal structure of Germany, effectively challenging Prussian primacy and threatening the return of strategic dualism to Central Europe.

Like Beseler, GGW officials believed that a German-Polish union would cohere, but not because they considered Poles especially sympathetic to Germany. Above all, occupation officials believed that Polish leaders would appreciate the need for a permanent alliance with Germany to secure their own autonomy.[559] Over time, they hoped that careful manipulation of Polish elites could fortify the country's fidelity to the German Empire. GGW policy-makers therefore recommended installing carefully selected Polish elites into positions of political authority, to supply Berlin with reliable levers with which to gradually shape Polish sentiment. Policy-makers therefore insisted on equipping the new Kingdom with a upper legislative house either appointed or elected by a conservative franchise. They did so not from any particular emotional affinity for conservative prerogatives. Rather, they argued that a conservatively structured upper house offered the best guarantee against "dangerous domestic and foreign policy experiments". More democratic leadership might challenge Berlin's suzerainty.[560]

Cleinow drafted even more detailed recommendations for securing a sufficient degree influence over Polish elites to ensure the "discipline" of the Polish government in Warsaw.[561] First, Berlin would need to organize Poland's bureaucracy during the construction of the Kingdom, carefully vetting the administration for reliable elements.[562] A constitutional monarchy would be necessary to provide a measure of continuity and predictability to the Polish government. As with the Polish army, Cleinow believed Berlin should retain the right of inspection for the Polish police and upper echelon's of the administration.[563] Aside from direct influence over royal administration, Cleinow proposed several measures to begin fostering sympathy for the German Empire among the Polish political, social, and cultural elites. He promoted the expansion of Poland deep into White Ruthenia, to both sate the appetites of zealous

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[553] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Draft 'Staatsvertrag' for Germany and Poland," 1916, 127, R1501/119670, BArch.
[554] von Kries, "Aufzeichnung über ihm vorschwebende Zukunftsmöglichkeiten für Polen," 18–20.
[555] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Aufzeichnung der polnischen Frage," 126.
[556] Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Ibid., 36.
[559] Generalgouvernement Warschau, "Aufzeichnung Der Polnischen Frage, 6 August 1916," August 6, 1916, 125–26, N30/20, BArch.
[560] Ibid., 126.
[561] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 82.
[562] Ibid., 95.
[563] Ibid., 82.

nationalists and replace the Russian export market now closed to Polish industrialists.[564] Of course, this would also effectively bulwark Germany's multinational empire in Eastern Europe.[565] He further hinted that discrete interventions in the education system might be employed to reinforce the perceived legitimacy of German suzerainty.[566] But more immediately, Cleinow encouraged Germany to energetically pursue close working relationships with the Roman Catholic church and Christian labor unions. Winning the sympathy of these institutions would quickly raise sympathy for Berlin among their mass constituencies.[567]

Finally, Cleinow suggested that Berlin finance and organize a massive railway and infrastructure project in the Kingdom of Poland after the war. Imperial funds would employ, train, and pension thousands of Polish bureaucrats, engineers, and laborers, directly buying their loyalty. It would also habituate Poles to collaborate with Berlin, and encourage them to see the German Empire as an economic benefactor, as well as a strategic shield.[568] Indeed, financing such a large project, Cleinow argued, would tangibly reinforce German-Polish economic integration, even as it built the foundations for a "Global-economically oriented transport policy". Poland, Cleinow hoped, would flourish as new hub for trade, linking Germany to Russian and Ukrainian markets and simultaneously open Poland's access to Western European and Atlantic trade.[569]

Finally, occupation personnel agreed with Beseler that the German Empire could only hope to secure Polish fidelity if Poles could reasonably trust that Berlin respected Polish cultural integrity and autonomy. They therefore considered Prussian domestic reform essential to German imperial policy.[570] Cleinow actually went considerably further, explicitly endorsing the forging of a German-Polish union as a process of imperial multinationalization. To build mutual trust, he insisted, both Poland and its German suzerain, would need to adopt sweeping domestic reforms to guarantee national minorities in both states the right education in their native tongue. "Free choice of mother-tongue! Free selection of school by parents!" Cleinow underscored, would be the watchwords of this reform.[571]

The growing consensus in the Government General of Warsaw around multinational imperial objectives for the region was reflected by a host of occupation policies which laid the foundations for Polish statehood.[572] The German occupation began establishing institutions of Polish municipal and district self-administration.[573] In city's the GGW continued to appoint mayors, but otherwise allowed municipal officials to be elected locally.[574] In January 1916, German authorities delegated local administrative responsibility to Poles in the country by promulgating the "District Regulation" [*Kreisordnung*] for rural self-governance.[575] In the Summer of 1916, the GGW oversaw elections for Warsaw's municipal government. Though the city's German and Jewish residents were permitted to vote and stand for office, fluency in Polish was required for a candidate to be eligible.[576] The election returned a city-government split fairly evenly between passivist, led by National Democrats, activists, and Jewish parties.[577] The German occupation considered these results satisfactory, and began preparing to hold further district and city elections.[578]

The German administration in Warsaw also worked diligently to establish a robust Polish education system in the region under occupation. The restoration of primary school services had

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[564] Ibid., 78.
[565] Ibid.
[566] Ibid., 81.
[567] Ibid.
[568] Ibid., 84.
[569] Ibid., 85.
[570] Ibid., 54–58, 74.
[571] Ibid., 83.
[572] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 4.
[573] Ibid., 70.
[574] Ibid., 73.
[575] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 111–12.
[576] Ibid., 126.
[577] Ibid., 129.
[578] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 97.

actually been initiated by Kries prior to the GGW as a means to occupy Polish youth and prevent delinquency. Education policy became the centerpiece of German efforts to prepare Congress Poland for national autonomy.[579] The GGW invested substantial resources in restoring education services to the region. By late 1916 the occupation had constructed or rehabilitated 7,000 schools, serving 400,000 students. Teachers and curricula were surveilled closely by German District Chiefs, to ensure that education did not subvert German authority, but Polish teachers later remembered German inspectors as fair.[580] German officials in Warsaw intended the education system to placate Polish national claims, and even hoped that it would stoke a Russophobic brand of Polish nationalism. Schools for Polish children would instruct in Polish, and teach German as a foreign language.[581] German officials also gave Polish educators a remarkable degree of latitude in forming their curricula. Geography classes did not narrowly focus on Congress Poland, but examined the vast expanses of the former Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth.[582] History classes often dwelled on nationalist themes, including Poles' 19th century uprisings against the Russian Empire.[583] Beseler also encouraged Poles to take increasing responsibility for the administration of their nascent education system. In October 1916, he permitted Poles to organize a central education advisory committee, though under the close supervision of occupation officials.[584]

Warsaw's University and Technical College became the crown-jewels of this state-building project. On Kries's recommendation, the GGW had opted to reopen the University of Warsaw soon after seizing the city.[585] In 1869, St. Petersburg had decided to wield the Imperial University of Warsaw as an instrument of Russification, replacing Polish academics with Russian professors, Russian students, and Russian curricula.[586] In September 1915, Kries convinced Beseler to reopen the city's Polytechnic and University with Polish as the language of instruction.[587] His reasoning already reflected multinationalist assumptions:

> Germany does not intend to keep this land forever, but rather wishes to bind it permanently to itself. It must be well-administered, it must have good civil servants, jurists, physicians, engineers, architects, technicians, indeed even philosophers. It is important that the Poles, when they one day assume the administration of the state, have the necessary specialists.[588]

The GGW therefore opened the university to train new cadres of Polish administrative, technical, and political elites to govern the Polish state.[589] Beseler and his subordinates hoped that the university would foster a strong, but manageable, sense of national identity among its pupils, one hostile to Russia and friendly towards Berlin. Courses in Polish national history and literature were therefore permitted. As proof of the occupation's sincere efforts to foster Polish national culture, Polish faculty were given a broad degree of autonomy, and significant control over their curricula.[590] Still, Beseler installed Hutten-Czapski as curator to monitor the university.[591]

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[579] Ibid., 115; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 149.
[580] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 142, 149.
[581] Ibid., 152.Initially, schools for Congress Poland's German minority were not burdened with teaching Polish as a second language. However, in response to objections that this disparity seemed to preface Germanization, Warsaw amended the policy in December 1915, insisting that German schools also teach Polish as a foreign language.
[582] Ibid., 149.
[583] Ibid.
[584] Ibid., 153.
[585] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 155.
[586] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 67.
[587] Ibid., 68.
[588] Quoted in Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 167.
[589] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 155, 169.
[590] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 71; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 178.
[591] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 70.

Imperial Policy-Makers Opt for a German-Polish Union

In the Spring of 1916, positive reports on the political atmosphere in Congress Poland, the GGW's insistence that the German Empire would be able to rely on Polish collaboration, and Warsaw's subsequent strong endorsement of a German-Polish union finally persuaded those policy-makers in Berlin who had hesitated to adopt a multinationalist strategy for Poland. The military, whose top leadership was already very inclined towards multinational imperialism in Poland, increased the pressure on Berlin to construct a German-Polish union. Falkenhayn had considered the multinationalist model advantageous and plausible since August. In the autumn he began attacking the Austro-Polish solution, arguing that it would expose Germany's frontier to invasion. On 15 October of 1915, Falkenhayn denounced Austria-Hungary as a "corpse" to Bethmann Hollweg, insisting that the Habsburg state could not be relied upon to effectively defend Congress Poland from Russian aggression.[592] Alternatively, if it managed to reform its political and military apparatus after the war, Falkenhayn fretted that an expanded Austria-Hungary might pose a severe threat to Germany in the future.[593] Falkenhayn therefore demanded a growing list of annexations in Poland and Eastern Europe as prerequisites for accepting an Austro-Polish solution: Lithuania, Kurland, Grodno, the Bobr-Narew line above Ostrolenka up to Plock, and, if possible, the territory in Congress Poland west of the Warta river.[594] Even then, the chief of the General Staff considered it necessary to bind the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires by means of a firm military convention. In other words, Falkenhayn believed that the Austro-Polish solution would demand both an optimistic degree of influence over Vienna, as well as burdensome and destabilizing territorial annexations.

Winter did not see an improvement in Falkenhayn's opinion of the Austro-Polish solution. On 23 January 1916, the Chief of the General Staff telegrammed the Chancellor, stating that further "experience" with the Austro-Hungarian army had convinced him that an Austro-Polish solution lacked any merit. He reiterated his concerns that Vienna would either prove an ineffectual steward of the strategic region, or that a revitalized Habsburg empire would threaten Germany from Congress Poland.[595] Falkenhayn therefore unequivocally endorsed multinational imperialism in the telegram, writing that it seemed "without a doubt", that the attachment of an autonomous Poland to the German Empire offered the "best guarantees" for "our future".[596] Importantly, Falkenhayn's statement of support, ultimately focused on long term questions of strategic security and imperial integrity, and not the possibility of recruiting Congress Poles as cannon-fodder for the present war.

In spite of their stormy relationship with Falkenhayn, Hindenburg and Ludendorff ultimately bowed to the same logic, and conceded that multinational imperialism represented the best model for achieving German objectives in Congress Poland. Ludendorff did not rescind his prior suggestion in favor of an autonomous Polish state under German Suzerainty. Hindenburg expressed stronger reservations and showed little faith that a Polish state would remain loyal to the German Empire. In communications with Beseler in March 1916, Hindenburg therefore insisted on considerable territorial annexations along the length of the German-Polish border, to secure the Germany in case multinational union miscarried.[597] By the end of the summer of 1916, Hindenburg still doubted that an autonomous Polish state would materially improve the German Empire's strategic position, but he reluctantly accepted that the policy represented the most plausible strategy for achieving German objectives in the region.[598]

Notable commanders in the German Army still opposed, or harbored reservations about a multinational model of rule. In addition to Seeckt's opposition, Lieutenant-Colonel Max

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[592] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to State Secretary von Jagow, 15 October 1915," October 15, 1915, 331, R21655, PA AA.
[593] Ibid., 332.
[594] Ibid., 331.
[595] Karl Georg von Treutler, "Report to the Foreign Office, 23 January 1916," January 23, 1916, 54, R21656, PA AA.
[596] Ibid., 55.
[597] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler," March 24, 1916, 2, N30/10, BArch.
[598] Paul von Hindenburg, "'Hindenburg an Reichskanzler' in 'Polen:Zusammenstellung aus der Akten der Reichskanzlei,'" August 23, 1916, 29, NL Jagow 3, PA AA.

Hoffmann, at the time Chief of Operations for Hindenburg and Ludendorff, nurtured private reservations. Pessimistic about the prospect of ruling Polish space, Hoffmann was reluctant to abandon the idea of a separate peace with the Russian Empire in the autumn of 1915.[599] In December 1915 he still favored making limited annexations for military purposes along the length of the German-Polish frontier.[600] Hoffmann refrained from discussing the creation of a new Kingdom of Poland and accepted the favorable judgment of his commanders.[601]

Positive news from Congress Poland also reinforced pressure on the Chancellery to adopt a multinational imperial policy. Erzberger and his *Zentralstelle* continued to advocate a unified policy of Prussian reform and Polish statehood. On 18 January 1916, Erzberger sent a memo to Bethmann Hollweg. Ezberger again emphasized that Polish Prussians had behaved "on the whole correctly". The document argued that radical nationalists actually represented the minority opinion in Prussia. He cited Napieralski's papers, attitudes in Upper Silesia, and the overtures of conservatives in Posen to argue that the vast majority wanted conciliation with Prussia.[602] To maintain Polish loyalty to the German Empire, the memo continued, Berlin needed to fortify existing loyalist elements.[603] The "understanding" between Germans and Poles, Erzberger clarified, relied upon the attitudes of the "royalist, rightwing circles", whose "influence" the state should systematically reinforce.[604] In particular, he recommended appointing sympathetic Polish politicians, like Franz von Dziersykraj-Morawski, to the Prussian House of Lords, to both insulate them from radical electoral pressures and as a public declaration of support for Polish loyalism.[605] It is noteworthy that even Erzberger's recommendations for reform on the Prussian domestic front proceeded from the assumption that Polish mass loyalty was to be one through mediation, by carefully cultivating the loyalty of influential political and social elites.

Erzberger's office on Budapesterstraße as a whole also continued to agitate for a multinational imperial model for Congress Poland. In May 1916, Bethmann Hollweg received Paul Rohrbach, by now an ardent proponent of Polish statehood under some form of German leadership, to discuss war aims in Eastern Europe.[606] The *Zentralstelle* essentially adopted a de facto multinationalist press policy over the course of 1915 and 1916. According to its own reports, by January 1916 the *Zentralstelle* had already begun supporting the distribution of pro-German papers like *Katolik* in the GGW and established a relationship with the Polish wire-service *Wat*, funneling news and propaganda from Berlin to Warsaw and Łódź. Erzberger hoped these measures would place predominant influence over smaller Congress Polish newspapers squarely in German hands.[607]

Reports on the political atmosphere in Congress Poland which reached the Chancellery reflected the emerging consensus in the GGW, that Germany would be able to rely upon a satellite Polish state to defend its interests. Regular reports from the Police President of Posen, Knesebeck, carried particular weight. Knesebeck, though hardly optimistic about German-Polish relations, ultimately believed that reconciliation was possible. In November 1915, he submitted a report to the Chancellery on Polish political attitudes in each of the three partitioning powers. Knesebeck's central contention was that Polish opinion was remarkably divided in each empire, presenting Berlin with opportunities to improve its image.[608] In Prussia, he noted that the Polish press generally demanded the abolition of discriminatory legislation, but embedded in these

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[599] Hoffmann, *War Diaries: And Other Papers*, 1:entry for 6 October 1915.
[600] Ibid., 1:entry for 17 December 1915.
[601] Ibid., 1:entries for 27 August, and 17 December 1915.
[602] Matthias Erzberger, "Zur Lösung der Polenfrage in Preussen," January 1916, 288–89, R43/1397a, BArch.
[603] Matthias Erzberger, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 18 January 1916," January 18, 1916, 287, R43/1397a, BArch.
[604] Erzberger, "Zur Lösung der Polenfrage in Preussen," 296.
[605] Ibid., 289. Wilhelm II would ultimately take Erzberger's advice, elevating Morawski to the Prussian House of Lords in January 1917.
[606] Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift*, 202.
[607] Erzberger, "Zur Lösung der Polenfrage in Preussen," 293–95.
[608] Knesebeck, "Report to the Imperial Chancellery, 7 December 1915," December 7, 1915, 257–59, R43/1397a, BArch.

demands were loyalist calls for lasting reconciliation.[609] Though German troops marching into Warsaw had been greeted with a frosty reception, Knesebeck reported happily that negative opinion of the German Empire stemmed primarily from specific grievances against Prussian policies, and not from any adamantine Russian loyalism.[610] Overall, the Police President of Posen suggested that Polish opinion was generally suspicious of Berlin, though not inevitably so.

Knesebeck's reports grew more optimistic with time. In March 1916, he still emphasized the notable diversity of Polish opinion, but noted happily that at least some in Congress Poland were receptive to the idea of an autonomous Polish "buffer-state" in "alliance" with Germany, or as part of *Mitteleuropa*.[611] By June, his reports on Polish opinion had become less equivocal, perhaps reflecting the positive effects of the GGW's benevolent cultural policies. Domestically, Knesebeck perceived a mounting rejection of Endek nationalism. He cited one Polish paper, the *Lissaer Kraj*, which denounced the political "dictatorship" of National Democrats, and their erroneous claims to "monopolize" political opinion, their "intolerance" of alternative forms of national patriotism, and their efforts to silence conciliationists through "intimidation and terrorism".[612] Another Polish paper, he reported, had concluded that "practical politics" demanded reconciliation with the German Empire and wished victory for the Central Powers, as this would be a victory for Poland. Indeed, Knesebeck pointed to several papers which had been convinced of Berlin's good faith by the occupation's benevolent policies. These, he pointed out, encouraged Poles to trust that the German Empire did not desire annexations in Poland. Instead, the formation of local structures of self-administration in Congress Poland signalled Germany's intention to create a Polish state as part of a "Central European Confederation".[613]

Of course regular positive reports from Beseler and other functionaries of the GGW to the Chancellery painted an increasingly optimistic portrait of Polish sentiment and prospects for collaboration. One report submitted on 16 May 1916 by Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, the GGW's deputy Chief of Administration, was particularly positive. The report detailed the outlook of Polish residents in the strategic mining region adjacent to Silesia.[614] The local population, it indicated, deeply mistrusted Germany and suspected that Berlin planned to annex and Germanize their community.[615] However, the report proceeded to argue that, aside from opposition to Germanization, the vast majority of residents had not yet developed any political commitments. Their political views were governed by "questions of the stomach" and "daily bread".[616] If hostile to German annexation, they still did not actively support independence. Indeed, the Legionary movement remained numerically small throughout Congress Poland, and in some regions completely irrelevant.[617] Poles, the report inferred, were in effect politically malleable.

Some in the *Reichsleitung* had already concluded that multinational imperialism was the only obvious way forward in Poland. Reports from Warsaw hardly affected their views. Delbrück had already reluctantly endorsed the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty. When he read Beseler's January report endorsing a German-Polish union, Delbrück noted that he largely agreed with Beseler's conclusions and that the report otherwise contained "not much new" regarding the Polish question.[618] He did warn, however, that even Beseler's recommendations for minor annexations in northern Congress Poland were incompatible with efforts to cultivate trust in Poland.[619]

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[609] Ibid., 261.
[610] Ibid., 264.
[611] Knesebeck, "Report to the Imperial Chancellery, 11 April 1916," April 11, 1916, 365, R43/1397a, BArch.
[612] Knesebeck, "Report to Chancellery on the Polish Press, 12 June 1916," June 12, 1916, 12, R43/1398, BArch.
[613] Ibid., 12–14.
[614] Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Report to the RAI, 16 May 1916," May 16, 1916, 169, R1501/119780, BArch.
[615] Editor in Chief of the Deutschen Warschauer Zeitung, "Report to the GGW on Polish Public Opinion," May 1916, 199, R1501/119780, BArch.
[616] Ibid., 177.
[617] Ibid., 185.
[618] Hans Hartwig von Beseler and Clemens von Delbrück, "Immediatbericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen vom 23. Jan. 1916 (kommentiert von Clemens von Delbrück)," January 25, 1916, 3–11, R1501/119710, BArch.
[619] Ibid., 11.

But increasingly positive assessments from Warsaw did buoy the confidence of a growing faction of multinationalists within the Chancellery. In the autumn and winter of 1915, Kurt Riezler renewed his agitation in support of multinational imperialism, now even daring to suggest the "eventual incorporation of Poland into the German Empire", perhaps with something like the "special position" that Bavaria had received.[620] Indeed, Riezler had become so confident in the reliability and advantages of a federally incorporated Poland, that he contemplated the annexation of Lithuanian territory by the new Kingdom of Poland.[621] Riezler, in effect, called for abandoning any expansion of Prussia, and instead supported the massive federal and multinational expansion of the German Empire eastward.

From August 1915, through spring 1916, the emerging consensus that an autonomous Polish state could be relied upon to defend Germany gradually convinced Bethmann Hollweg to adopt multinationalism as Berlin's official policy for Poland. Already on 11 November 1915, he began demanding more extensive concessions from Vienna to permit at Austro-Polish solution. In negotiations with Burián, the Chancellor insisted upon substantial border-annexations, both in the North and West of Congress Poland as compensation.[622] Bethmann Hollweg also reserved Germany's claims to ownership of Russian state domains, for the purpose of a potential "resettlement" of Polish residents from these annexed territories.[623] Whether Bethmann Hollweg was thinking in terms of a forcible or voluntary resettlement is not clear. However, the Chancellor surely must have suspected by this point what German demographers and most policy-makers had already realized, the amount of people that could be settled on Russian state domains would have virtually no impact on the demography of annexed territories.

Even as the Chancellor raised the price of the Austro-Polish solution for Vienna, he made it abundantly clear that he still considered the Polish question unresolved, and wanted to keep Berlin's policy options open.[624] Two days after negotiating with Burián, on the 13th, Bethmann Hollweg revealed his thoughts on Poland in a presentation to the Bundesrat. Poland, the Chancellor began, was Germany's absolute strategic priority. The final resolution of the Polish question necessarily took precedent over plans for *Mitteleuropa*. He emphasized, however, that the matter had not yet been decided and that the Chancellery was even still considering returning Congress Poland to Russian control as part of a separate peace deal.[625] Only two potential solutions, he reported, had been finally excluded from consideration; the wholesale annexation of Congress Poland to Germany, which was sure to incite lasting popular unrest; and the creation of an independent Polish state, which was sure to destabilize Eastern Europe as the surrounding empires fought for primacy.[626] If Germany submitted to an Austro-Polish solution, Bethmann Hollweg assured the assembled federal representatives, it would be under conditions which still secured Germany's eastern frontier. For one, the Chancellor believed that Austrian possession of Poland would require a more robust *Mitteleuropa* to coordinate the interests of Vienna and Berlin and ensure that the region was effectively defended.[627] More specifically, Bethmann Hollweg indicated that Germany would need to effectively control strategic infrastructure in Congress Poland, including rail lines and waterways.[628] Finally, he confirmed that an Austro-Polish solution would expand the scale of "strategically necessary" border annexations in Congress Poland.[629]

In contrast to this pessimistic assessment of an Austro-Polish solution, the Chancellor offered altogether positive notes on the possibility of a German-Polish union to the Bundesrat.

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[620] Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, "Austro-Hungarian Letter of Protest to the German Chancellor, 29 April 1916," April 29, 1916, 32–33, N30/20, BArch.
[621] Ibid., 33.
[622] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 210; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 98.
[623] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg and Stephan von Burián, "Minutes of Meeting between Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and Foreign Mninister Burián, 14 November 1915," November 14, 1915, 34, R21656, PA AA.
[624] Ibid., 27–34.
[625] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Speech before the Bundesrat, 13 November 1915," November 13, 1915, 125–27, R43/405, BArch.
[626] Ibid., 125.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid., 126.
[629] Ibid., 127.

> To our Poles, in part, the best solution is seen in equipping Congress Poland with extensive Autonomy, to guarantee political rights for its [the Polish nation's] appendage within Germany, binding it politically, militarily, and economically closely to Germany and letting it be governed under the leadership of a Governor chosen by Germany.[630]

Bethmann Hollweg left the matter open in the *Bundesrat* but his comments are indicative nonetheless. Multinationalism was the only model the Chancellor presented without severe criticism. Whether the Chancellor was simply listing options, or actively sounding out the position of the federal governments vis-à-vis Congress Poland, it seems that Bethmann Hollweg was already leaning towards the creation of an autonomous Polish state by November 1915.

A few months later, the Chancellor had narrowed Germany's options to either an multinationalist or Austro-Polish solution. In a letter sent to Beseler on 8 January 1916, Bethmann Hollweg stated that he considered possibility of a separate peace with Russia closed.[631] For the time being, the Chancellor instructed Beseler to keep the question open, but tellingly encouraged his efforts to cultivate Polish sympathy for the German Empire, so that the "frontiers, upon which Germany will be defended in the future, lie behind the Bug".[632] Though non-committal, the latter statement signaled the Chancellor's preference for a German-Polish union.

The rest of Bethmann Hollweg's letter expressed his excitement with the impact of Beseler's relatively small policy interventions on manipulating Polish nationalist sentiment. He recognized that most Poles were not enthused by the German occupation. Yet was heartened by the impression that reopening Warsaw University had made upon the population. He encouraged Beseler to continue Polonizing the local school system to further identify "Polish hopes for liberation" with German sponsorship.[633] He approved of the GGW permitting Poles to hold anti-Russian demonstrations and he encouraged Beseler to reach out to nationalist leaders.[634] The Chancellor also pushed Beseler to make use of the levers commonly thought to dictate Polish political sentiment. Gaining the support of the Roman Catholic clergy, he agreed, would secure a ready instrument of influence over the population, while simultaneously mitigating Germany's reputation for anti-Ultramontanism.[635] Finally, Bethmann Hollweg endorsed Beseler's efforts to admit Congress Poles into positions of administrative responsibility, vesting them with a sense of autonomy and influence over their nation's economic and cultural destiny.[636] The German Empire's priorities in Congress Poland, the Chancellor emphasized, would be to reorient nationalist discourse against Russia, while also convincing Poles that their "internal freedom in not threatened by us".[637] The German Empire, he insisted, must "command over a sentiment in the country" which recognized the vulnerability of independence, and convince Poles through upright behavior that "attachment to the Central Powers without complete stately independence" would not entail the "repression of the Polish character".[638]

Bethmann Hollweg also began coordinating occupation policies on the Eastern Front to support the creation of a German-Polish union. Two weeks later, the Chancellor issued new instructions to Hindenburg on handling the considerable Polish population residing under his authority in Ober Ost. For one, he commanded Hindenburg to begin administering the governorate of Suwałki under the assumption that it would not be allocated to any Polish state.

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[630] Ibid., 125–26.
[631] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 8 January 1916," January 8, 1916, 1, N30/12, BArch.
[632] Ibid., 5–6.
[633] Ibid., 4.
[634] Ibid.
[635] Ibid., 6.
[636] Ibid., 5.
[637] Ibid., 2, 6.
[638] Ibid., 3.

This would confirm Berlin's intention to annex the northernmost reach of Congress Poland.[639] However, Bethmann Hollweg had other reasons for publicizing this annexation.

> Separation will be easily interpreted by the Polish population as an announcement that this area, and only this area, shall be ceded from the future Poland.[640]

Confirming the transfer of authority over Suwałki to Ober Ost indicates Bethmann Hollweg's intention to pursue a German-Polish union for two reasons. First, securing the trust and support of the Polish population required carefully adhering to German statements on war aims. Because virtually all policy-makers in Berlin agreed upon the need to annex Suwałki, the German Empire needed to publicize this intention now, to avoid the appearance of reneging on implied promises of Polish territorial integrity in the future. Secondly, Suwałki alone represented far less than the territorial concessions thought to be necessary under an Austro-Polish policy.

Bethmann Hollweg simultaneously assured Hindenburg that Lithuanian territory would not, as figures like Gothein and Riezler proposed, be appended to a Polish state. He therefore licensed the general to discourage Polish nationalism within Ober Ost.[641] However, he cautioned the commander not to allow the "defense against Greater-Polish tendencies" to assume the character of a "brusque struggle against Polandom".[642] Days after coordinating policy with Hindenburg, Bethmann Hollweg received Beseler's 23 January 1916 report recommending the creation of a German Polish union. On 24 January, the Chancellor pressed the Prussian Interior Ministry to accelerate its efforts to revise *Ostmarkenpolitik* and withdraw any policies which "could be regarded by the Poles as an illegitimate repression".[643]

By mid-February 1916 at the latest, Bethmann Hollweg considered himself fully committed to a German-Polish union. In a 21 February 1916 letter to Beseler, the Chancellor conceded that the optimum outcome in Poland would be "a state which is itself militarily and economically incorporated into the German confederation, but otherwise self-governing".[644] This objective, the Chancellor indicated, would govern Berlin's policy going forward. He requested the Beseler's patience. Negotiations to secure Vienna's divestment from the region could not begin until the Central Powers had secured gains in the Balkans which might be used to compensate their ally.[645] For the moment, Bethmann Hollweg instructed Beseler to begin sapping support for the Austro-Hungarian Empire among Poles, primarily through verbal propaganda. He suggested encouraging doubts about Budapest's willingness to accept Austro-Trialism, as well as leaking that Germany would only accept an Austro-Polish solution if Vienna surrendered "considerable border territories" to Germany.[646] This, he argued, should be complimented by a more overt positive press campaign to win support for an "*Anschluß* to Germany".[647] The primary importance of this letter, is of course Bethmann Hollweg's stated commitment to multinational imperialism. However, it also once again confirms that the Chancellor considered a German-Polish union and a border-strip to be incompatible and competing solutions to the Polish question. In supporting the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German Suzerainty, the Chancellor in effect scrapped efforts to seize considerable annexations from Congress Poland.

Beseler ultimately refused the Chancellor's suggestions for propaganda, but not out of opposing interests or principle. Rather, the Governor General believed that the unequivocal legitimacy of a German-Polish union could only be secured by Austria's public renunciation of

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[639] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Field Marshall Hindenburg at Ober Ost," January 20, 1916, 22, N30/12, BArch.
[640] Ibid.
[641] Ibid., 23.
[642] Ibid.
[643] Quoted in Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 103.
[644] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 21 February 1916," February 21, 1916, 28, N30/12, BArch.
[645] Ibid.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Ibid.

claims to Congress Poland. The patronage of the German Empire needed to be Polish national elites' only option for protection from the Russian Empire.[648] Otherwise, Beseler and the Chancellor were on the same page.

The Foreign Office, though more reluctant, also finally committed to a multinational imperial model for Poland. Two factors proved decisive in swaying the institution: the growing optimism of the GGW that Polish political sentiment was sufficiently malleable to secure collaboration, and the final loss of faith in the viability of the Austro-Polish solution. Proposals from multinationalist publicists and intellectuals continued to arrive on Wilhelmstraße throughout the winter of 1915 and the spring of 1916.[649] In November of 1915, the Foreign Office received the comprehensive memorandum on war aims in Eastern Europe penned by the faculty of the Silesian Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Breslau. The document, which strongly recommended the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, impressed the Foreign Office enough that they relayed it to the Chancellery in December.[650]

Over this period, multinational imperialism seemed increasingly plausible, both in light of the GGW's assessments, as well as the Foreign Office's own independent sources of information on Polish sentiment. Already on 17 September 1915, the German press bureau in Warsaw circulated two excerpts from the Polish press to both the Chancellery and the Foreign Office. The first, from the *Dziennik Polski*, reflected the passivist attitude prevalent in Congress Poland, counseling patience and hinting that the Western Powers might yet offer the Polish nation a better deal.[651] The second clipping from *Goniec*, however, took a strong activist stance, insisting upon Poles' desire for independence, but admitting that Poland could not defend itself against Russia alone.[652] The author had therefore advocated an autonomous Polish state, bound by permanent "military convention" with the central powers. Though this would involve the "limitation of our [Poland's] sovereignty in military matters", he considered this a minor concession necessary to confront the enduring menace of Russia.[653]

In November, the Foreign Office received an encouraging report from its consulate in Bern.[654] The German minister in Bern, Gisbert von Romberg, relayed the political assessments made by a conservative Polish sympathizer after travelling through Russian Poland. The sympathizer, Romberg summarized, was "permeated by the idea that, from a national-Polish standpoint, only the unification between Germany and Poland could resolve the Polish question".[655] The Pole had further explained that few Russophiles remained in Poland and that most Poles were generally satisfied with the performance of the occupation and acknowledged Kries's efforts to improve German-Polish relations.[656] The sympathizer argued that Congress Poland actually offered relatively fertile ground for future collaboration. The "greater part" of Polish society, he noted, belonged to no political party. It was, in essence, up for grabs. The prevailing political attitude in Congress Poland, according to Romberg's source, could be described as ambivalence, "only no more Russians".[657] The Polish sympathizer had concluded by suggesting that Berlin adopt a targeted political strategy to win over Polish confidence, focused on the mainly apolitical, but numerous peasantry by emphasizing the profits to be gained by attachment to German markets. Germany's second priority, he suggested, would be to win over

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[648] von Beseler, "'Reinkonzept' Sent to the Chancellor, 2 March 1916," 30–33.
[649] Adolf Grabowsky, "Letter to the Foreign Office, 6 February 1916," February 6, 1916, 327, R21575, PA AA.
[650] Faculty of the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau, "Petition by a Number of Silesian Scholars to the Foreign Office, 7 December 1915," December 7, 1915, 123, R21575, BArch; Alfred Hillebrandt and Johannes Nikel, "Memorandum Submitted by Faculty of the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelm University in Breslau to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office," November 1915, 124–59, R 21575, PA AA.
[651] Warsaw Press Bureau, "Report to Bethmann Hollweg, 17 September 1915," September 17, 1915, 181, R21574, PA AA.
[652] Ibid., 180.
[653] Ibid., 180–81.
[654] von Kowalski, "Report on Travels through Warsaw and Occupied Poland, October 1915," October 1915, 116, R21575, PA AA.
[655] Ibid.
[656] Ibid., 116–18.
[657] Ibid., 116.

the lower echelons of the Roman Catholic clergy.[658]

On 8 December, a similar report reached Undersecretary Zimmermann, detailing a conversation between a Prussian *Justizrat* and the "most important Polish leaders".[659]

> … these, with the usual reservations, perceive Poland as a German federal state with a Prussian Prince, if possible with the attachment of Posen and Western Galicia, as the best solution.[660]

The report estimated that 75% of the Polish population shared essentially the same opinion.[661] Congress Poles, the report explained, had come to prefer German suzerainty because they increasingly believed that Austria-Hungary lacked the finances, administrative competence, and military skill to reconstruct a Polish state and successfully protect it from Russian designs.[662] Congress Poles considered the Russian Empire the "central danger" to their national existence and believed that only union with the German Empire could defend their autonomy.[663]

Finally, on 1 March 1916, the prominent Prussian conciliationists Franciszek "von" Morawski submitted his own report to the Foreign Office.[664] In essence, Morawski believed that the a German-Polish union represented the ideal balance between German imperial and Polish national interests and Congress Poles could be persuaded to accept this union as legitimate.[665] Congress Poles, Morawski stated bluntly, wanted to govern their own affairs. Whether self-governance occurred in the context of Russian, Austrian, or German dominion, was a secondary question for them.[666] Though certainly some in Congress Poland favored Austrian or Russian rule, Morawski insisted that these preferences were superficial.[667] According to Morawski, the "Prussian party among the Poles", had already grown significantly during the war.[668] In Prussia itself, he described the various conservative and Catholic loyalist movements as "incontestably the majority of the people", the radical secessionist element small by comparison.[669] The only major obstacle to gaining Polish trust in the German Empire, was proving that Germany did not intend to "de-nationalize" or "colonize" Polish territory.[670] If Berlin could both dismantle Prussia's discriminatory legislation, and build an autonomous Polish state, Morawski predicted that most of Congress Poland's various nationalist movements would fall in line behind German suzerainty.[671] To quickly win the loyalty of Polish nationalists, he further recommended awarding Warsaw the hinterland between Vilnius and Pinsk.[672]

By March 1916, the Foreign Office had been convinced that a significant segment of Congress Poland's population could be persuaded to collaborate with the German Empire. On 11 March, one particular essay written by a resident of Congress Poland circulated in the Foreign Office. The author argued that Poland could not realistically hope for independence and that only an "autonomous" Poland in political union with one of the Central Powers could "protect the free development" of the Polish nation.[673] The author himself preferred an "autonomous state" bound to the German Empire, believing that German suzerainty would obtain greater autonomy, prevent

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[658] Ibid., 117–19.
[659] Dr. W Loewenfeld, "Report to Undersecretary Arthur Zimmermann, 8 December 1915," December 8, 1915, 167, R21575, PA AA.
[660] Ibid.
[661] Ibid.
[662] Ibid., 168.
[663] Ibid.
[664] Franciczek von Morawski, "Die innerpolnischen Beratungen und Strömungen gegenüber den Kriegsführenden Mächten," March 1, 1916, 105, R21656, BArch.
[665] Ibid., 111.
[666] Ibid.
[667] Ibid.
[668] Ibid., 107.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid., 105.
[671] Ibid., 110–11.
[672] Ibid., 111.
[673] Foreign Office, "Wishes of the Poles," March 11, 1916, 127–28, R21656, PA AA.

any annexations, provide better security, and offer better economic prospects for Congress Poland.[674] The author further enjoined his co-nationals to trust Berlin, citing the GGW's benevolent policies towards Polish cultural and political participation.[675] The Foreign Office was so convinced of the growing preference in Congress Poland for German suzerainty that it simply marked the essay "Wishes of the Poles".[676]

Even as Poles' acceptance of a German-Polish union seemed increasingly plausible, doubts over the advisability of an Austro-Polish solution also mounted in the Foreign Office. On 29 April 1916, Germany's ambassador in Vienna warned Jagow that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was incredibly fragile. Ambassador Tschirschky frankly worried that Austro-Trialism would break the architecture of the Danubian monarchy.[677] Tschirschky's assessment had only grown grimmer by April 1916, he bluntly told Jagow that he could no longer condone an Austro-Polish solution under any conditions.[678] Much like Falkenhayn, Tschirschky worried that Austrian rule would either prove so incompetent as to expose Germany's eastern frontier to Russian aggression, or competent enough that an expanded Austro-Hungarian Empire might threaten Berlin. Worse yet, a resurgent Polish nationalism might push Vienna to embark on an irredentist crusade against Prussia.[679] German security in the East, the ambassador concluded, would only be assured if Germany controlled Congress Poland militarily, preferably through the "foundation of a Polish state under attachment to Germany".[680] Though cognizant of difficulties in ensuring the fidelity of such a state to the German Empire, he considered the same risk of irredentism and betrayal present in every resolution to the Polish question to some degree.[681] German suzerainty, at least, offered some hope of manipulating Polish national elites. "Winning the Vatican for our solution", Tschirschky suggested, "and their corresponding recruitment of the clergy", could legitimize German suzerainty and stabilize the German-Polish relationship.[682] Tschirschky concluded that Berlin should offer Vienna virtually anything to divest from Congress Poland, including Serbia and incentives in the Balkans and Volhynia.[683]

Gerhard von Mutius, the Foreign Office representative in the GGW, also began pressuring Wilhelmstraße to promote a multinational imperial agenda for Poland. In a series of letters written to Jagow beginning on 10 February 1916, Mutius enjoined his superior to support an autonomous Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty, or, as Jagow would describe the scheme, a "Grand Duchy of Warsaw" closely attached to the German Empire.[684] Mutius assured Jagow that Germany would be able to rely upon the loyalty of a Polish state, and submitted that trusted Polish sources had actually indicated that most Poles would prefer "dependence" on Germany over Austria-Hungary.[685] On 27 March 1916, Mutius again pressed the Foreign Office to throw its full support behind a German-Polish union. Poland, he argued, represented the "fulcrum" of German foreign and domestic policy, the very key to its future as a continental power.[686] He again insisted on the necessity of establishing an "autonomous Congress Poland in dependence on the German Empire".[687] Conceding that Russian loyalism still existed among the

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[674] Ibid., 136–38.
[675] Ibid., 135–38.
[676] Ibid., 125.
[677] Heinrich von Tschirschky, "Letter to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 29 October 1915," October 29, 1915, 6–7, R21656, PA AA.
[678] Heinrich von Tschirschky, "Report to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 6 April 1916," April 6, 1916, 218, R21656, PA AA.
[679] Ibid., 218–20.
[680] Ibid., 220–24.
[681] Ibid., 221.
[682] Ibid., 224.
[683] Ibid., 220–23. He assumed that the Habsburg dynasty in Poland would be so rapidly polonized as to sever any meaningful influence from Vienna.
[684] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Summary of Letters from Gerhard von Mutius, February-March 1916," March 24, 1916, 175–76, R21656, PA AA.
[685] Ibid., 176.
[686] Gerhard von Mutius, "Report to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 27 March 1916," March 27, 1916, 179, R21656, PA AA.
[687] Ibid., 180.

Polish population, Mutius nonetheless believed that the German Empire could win the loyalty of the Polish intelligentsia by granting autonomy. The intelligentsia would, in turn, "take over leadership" of the Polish nationalist movement and bend it towards "anti-Russian" ends.[688]

Jagow himself hesitated to abandon an Austro-Polish solution until the spring of 1916, citing the importance of the bilateral alliance and his hope that Berlin might gain de facto control over the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire. But Jagow's confidence in Austria-Hungary decayed rapidly. By early November he agreed with Tschirschky's negative opinions of the Austro-Polish solution.[689] Mutius's letter of support for multinational imperialism on 10 February 1916 might have finally pushed Jagow to revise his position. On 16 February 1916, Jagow disowned the Austro-Polish solution in communication with Tschirschky.[690] Instead, Jagow tentatively gave his endorsement to the "foundation of a Polish state under firm attachment to Germany".[691] The economic, strategic, and political advantages offered by German suzerainty, Jagow hoped, would eventually earn Polish fidelity to a German-Polish union.[692] He also cited positive reports from the GGW that seemed to indicate the presence of a "strong party, which, under the correct impression that German administration is bringing order and prosperity to the country, would much rather see their future attachment to Germany".[693] Jagow now desired firm institutions to bind Poland in Germany, including a treaty of union, and articles of union written into both state constitutions. As with Bethmann Hollweg, Jagow refrained from immediately opening discussions with Vienna, warning Tschirschky that Vienna had not yet voiced substantial enough ambitions in Serbia to allow Berlin to propose a credible trade.[694] Jagow therefore waited until April to begin consulting with Tschirschky over Germany's negotiating strategy to secure Austro-Hungarian divestment.[695]

The Prussian Ministry of the Interior alone remained a stalwart bastion of opposition to multinational imperialism. Despite optimistic reports from Warsaw, Loebell continued to insist that Poles could not be trusted to defend the German Empire. In December 1915 he referred to a "great number" of concerning incidents involving Polish soldiers in the field, including desertion, surrender, and even enlistment in enemy armies.[696] Loebell's accusations remained vague and, curiously, military commanders who commented on the Polish question seemed either unconcerned with, or even impressed by, the performance of Polish soldiers. Loebell admitted that no evidence yet "incriminated" Upper Silesian Poles. Reports from local authorities had unanimously assured Berlin that Polish speakers in Upper Silesia had behaved loyally.[697] Indeed, Loebell proved just as incapable of producing meaningful evidence of Polish treachery as the *Ostmarkenverein* had. He cited instead the insufficiently supportive tone of the Polish press, particularly papers associated with National Democracy, which remained infuriatingly "cool" and "reserved" towards positive military developments.[698] But Loebell had to hedge even this statement, conceding that Napieralski's organs and other unnamed papers in Posen and West Prussia had adopted admittedly "conciliatory" positions towards Berlin.[699] Still, Loebell griped that he just didn't trust the Poles.

He therefore fervently supported the continued application of discriminatory legislation

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[688] Ibid., 181–82.
[689] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Letter to Heinrich von Tschirschky, 6 November 1915," November 6, 1915, 10, R21656, PA AA.
[690] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Letter to Heinrich von Tschirschky, 16 February 1916," February 16, 1916, 84, R21656, PA AA.
[691] Ibid., 87.
[692] Ibid., 88.
[693] Ibid., 85.
[694] Ibid., 88.
[695] von Tschirschky, "Report to State Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, 6 April 1916," 225–26.
[696] Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, "Report to the Imperial Chancellery, 13 December 1915," December 13, 1915, 222–23, R43/1397a, BArch.
[697] Ibid., 222.
[698] Ibid., 223.
[699] Ibid.

towards Prussia's Polish minority.[700] Loebell also ardently opposed multinational union with Poland. Having seen the Chancellor's correspondence with Beseler in early January, he begged Bethmann Hollweg to abandon this course, and instead support the annexation of a border-strip of territory along the Warta-Narew line.[701] He further recommended that the GGW begin preparing these territories for annexation and eventual Germanization.[702] Specifically, he suggesting facilitating the emigration of resident Poles and Jews eastward, insofar as it was possible to do this without "noticeable coercion".[703] Loebell therefore espoused a nationalizing model of ethnic management months after virtually every other policy-maker of any weight in the Polish question had already abandoned the paradigm.

However, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior was by no means united behind Loebell's support for nationalizing imperialism. Several high level officials, though supportive of limited annexations and suspicious of multinational union, still stopped short of nationalization as a policy of ethnic management. In October 1915, the Provincial Committee of East Prussia relayed a memorandum to Loebell, which called for a "defensive wall of annexations" in Congress Poland to secure the German border from Russian invasion.[704] However, whilst supporting colonization in the Baltic littoral, the memo admitted that the border-territories of Congress Poland offered no prospect for German settlement.[705] The document assumed that the Polish residents of annexed regions would remain in place, but hoped that this population growth would "expand" Germany's military power.[706] The memo's predictions of economic growth likewise presumed additional Polish laborers would greatly expand the German Empire's workforce.[707] The Provincial Committee of East Prussia, in short, took seriously the idea of annexing Polish territory without implementing nationalizing procedures of ethnic management.

High-ranking Prussian administrators in the eastern provinces also proved remarkably sympathetic to their Polish speaking citizens, and often resisted nationalizing models of ethnic management. Several elite Prussian administrators vocally described Polish subjects as demonstrably loyal to the Prussian crown, called for an end to *Ostmarkenpolitik*, and even endorsed the creation of an autonomous, or even independent, Polish state. Surprisingly, it was often those Prussian administrators and Police personnel stationed in the Prussian *Ostmark* who provided some of the most overt and consistent support for multinationalist ethnic management. In this critical period of debate over German objectives and strategies in Poland, a row of prominent bureaucrats from the eastern provinces reported to Berlin, describing with satisfaction the political deportment and attitudes of their Polish citizens. Their input was perhaps more important than the arguments of figures like Loebell, largely because their reports functioned as evidence which clarified the central question of Polish imperial loyalism, rather than offering yet more speculative argumentation.

As administrative head of the region most closely identified with nationalist competition, Posen's *Oberpräsident* Hans von Eisenhart-Rothe, would perhaps be expected to favor more hardline nationalizing proposals to end ethnic strife by fiat. In reality, he consistently championed policies of German-Polish reconciliation in Prussia during the early years of the war. We have already noted how, in September of 1914, he had reported effusively on the apparent loyalty of Polish Prussians. A year later he wrote to a fellow Prussian bureaucrat, expressing his outrage with the *Ostmarkenverein*'s continued slander of Polish citizens.[708] "To handle the Poles poorly and then demand from them, that they exhibit public joy on the occasion

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[700] Ibid., 232.
[701] von Loebell, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 1 February 1916," 112.R1501/119670, 112. See also Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 105.
[702] von Loebell, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 1 February 1916," 112.
[703] Ibid., 113.
[704] Provincial Committee of East Prussia, "Petition to the Imperial Chancellor, 27 October 1915," October 27, 1915, 81–82, R21575, PA AA.
[705] Ibid., 83.
[706] Ibid., 84.
[707] Ibid., 87.
[708] Hans von Eisenhart-Rothe, "Letter to Eichmann, 21 September 1915," September 21, 1915, 205–6, R43/1397a, BArch.

of our victories," Eisenhart-Rothe fumed, "is an absurdity". Conversely, Eisenhart had found that when he treated Poles "amicably" they were "mostly entirely reasonable".[709] He continued:

> The Hakatists believed in a revolt of the Poles at the outbreak of war. After they saw themselves mistaken, they predicted the event for when the Russians would invade our land. Now, after this concern is over, they claim that they [the Poles] would have risen up, if the Russians had invaded. Nobody can refute them, but it is as idiotic as the first prophecy. Then we might have found a single weapon or 1 pound of gunpowder during our famous house searches and the like.[710]

Eisenhart-Rothe was clear in his position. Prophecies of Polish treachery had failed to materialize. Among the large and politically mobilized Polish population of Posen, police surveillance had simply found no evidence of anti-statist conspiracy. Libelous claims of Polish reluctance, Eisenhart-Rothe suggested, shattered before the hard fact of Polish loyalism. For him, Prussia's nationalizing policies of ethnic management were both demonstrably useless and counterproductive. His letter was forwarded to the Chancellery during the war, where it contributed to Berlin's overall perception of the German-Polish problem.[711]

Division in the Prussian Interior Ministry was also apparent in Loebell's report to the Chancellery on 13 December 1915. Therein Loebell detailed internal discussions among him and the *Oberpräsidenten* of East Prussia, Pomerania, Posen, Silesia, and West Prussia over potential reforms to Prussian polish policy.[712] Most of his *Oberpräsidenten* had expressed their desire to moderate or adjust particular *Ostmarkenpolitik*. All had supported the abolition of the expropriation law, "as soon as possible".[713] In principle, the officials had agreed that no rash action should "jeopardize" the German character of the Prussian state, and that non-German "language and culture" could not be afforded full "equality".[714] Even here, the *Oberpräsidenten* of Posen and Silesia took exception. Breslau called for more lenient standards for its famously loyal population in Upper Silesia.[715] Eisenhart-Rothe, while accepting the necessity of bracing the German language, insisted that concessions to Polish claims in education would better serve Berlin by vindicating the loyalism of conservative Polish politicians.[716] Posen further insisted on allowing Catholic religious instruction in Polish.[717] The *Oberpräsidenten* also supported other cultural concessions. All agreed that Polish newspapers should henceforth be sold in train stations.[718] The *Oberpräsident* of East Prussia suggested restructuring the "*deutschtumsfond*" into a general cultural fund available to all residents of the region. The *Oberpräsidenten* even considered liberalizing Polish access to careers in the Prussian bureaucracy.[719]

There was also considerable disagreement over how, or whether, to continue financial support for German settlement in the *Ostmark*. Eisenhart-Rothe supported reorienting the Prussian Settlement Commission towards purely economic ends, essentially denationalizing the institution and allowing "politically innocuous" Poles to also apply for its services.[720] Loebell would not allow it. Yet the meeting reached consensus that Settlement Commission activities should be calibrated regionally. In zones of more doubtful Polish loyalty it would proceed as before, pursuing a German nationalist agenda. In less worrisome areas, it would become a purely economic institution, subsidizing both Polish and German settlement.[721] Securring German

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[709] Ibid., 205.
[710] Ibid., 206.
[711] Ibid., 205–6.
[712] von Loebell, "Report to the Imperial Chancellery, 13 December 1915," 222–51.
[713] Ibid., 239.
[714] Ibid., 225.
[715] Ibid.
[716] Ibid.
[717] Ibid., 244.
[718] Ibid., 246.
[719] Ibid., 249.
[720] Ibid., 228.
[721] Ibid., 230.

majorities for Reichstag and Landtag elections would remain a priority.[722] Loebell was uncomfortable with the results of the meeting. In a cover-letter appended to the report Loebell warned that, if the outcome of the war enabled nationalists in Congress Poland to operate more freely, Prussia would more than ever require an effective political "rampart" in the *Ostmark*.[723]

Observations of public sentiment in occupied Poland in this period actually convinced several key Prussian officials of the plausibility of multinational union. Given the potential ramifications of occupation policy for public order in Posen, Police President Knesebeck naturally took an interest in the GGW. In autumn 1915, he sent his deputy, *Polizeirat* Göhrke, on an initial fact-finding tour or Łódź, Kalisz, Czestachowa, and Warsaw.[724] The Knesebeck-Göhrke reports actually carried considerable weight and were circulated widely. They were submitted to the undersecretary of state for the Prussian Interior Ministry, who duly relayed them to both the Imperial Office of the Interior and the Imperial Chancellor. They became a significant data point for Berlin's judgment on the feasibility of reconciling German and Polish interests.[725]

Göhrke and Knesebeck offered initially cautious judgments of the political climate in Congress Poland. In October 1915, they focused primarily on the political influence of Russian loyalism within the *Endecja*, and fretted that National Democrats in occupied Poland maintained surreptitious, potential treacherous, relations with their counterparts in Prussia.[726] Worried about anti-German coordination, they recommended increased surveillance of Posen-Warsaw postal traffic.[727] In Congress Poland, they found that no Poles were interested in becoming "citizens of the German Empire", and instead confirmed that many hoped for independence.[728]

Despite these real concerns, Göhrke and Knesebeck did not believe the popular resistance to constitute an immediate threat to the occupation. They even perceived potential avenues of influence for the German Empire. They found the majority of the Polish population to be politically ambivalent, with only a few uncompromising nationalists among them.[729] The sudden disappearance of oppressive Russian censorship, they argued, had unleashed "chaos" as a flood of parties and factions emerged and struggled for definition and constituency.[730] They believed that the Endeks were already vulnerable, weakened by Dmowski's groveling loyalism to Petrograd, and split between his faction and supporters of independence.[731] Without the *Ochrana* to bottle them up, Göhrke and Knesebeck also noted the self-assertion of Poland's independence parties, some of which wanted to join the current war against the Russian Empire.[732]

In May 1916, Knesebeck and Göhrke coordinated a second inspection tour of police facilities in the GGW to assess the state of the Polish nationalist movements.[733] The tour coincided with the 3 May Constitution celebrations, which made a significant impression on the two police officers from Posen.[734] In their subsequent report, filed on 22 July 1916, the pair argued that political opinion in Congress Poland had swung decisively in Germany's favor since October. From watching the celebrations and parades in Warsaw, they perceived a near unanimous desire for Polish statehood among nationally minded Poles.[735] With Russian loyalism in retreat, they believed that Polish nationalist discourse was primarily defined by disagreements over the degree

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[722] Ibid., 235.
[723] Ibid., 222.
[724] Knesebeck and Polizeirat Göhrke, "Compiled Reports by Polizeirat Göhrke on Observations in Occupied Poland," October 7, 1915, 15, R1501/119662, BArch.
[725] Ibid., 14.
[726] Ibid., 22, 42–44.
[727] Ibid., 44–45.
[728] Ibid., 48–50.
[729] Ibid., 47.
[730] Ibid., 17.
[731] Ibid., 22.
[732] Ibid., 40, 51.
[733] Knesebeck, "Letter to the Prussian Interior Minister, 20 March 1916," March 20, 1916, 102–3, R1501/119662, BArch.
[734] Knesebeck and Göhrke, "Report on Tour through the GGW, 22 July 1916," July 22, 1916, 379, R1501/119662, BArch.
[735] Ibid., 380–81.

of independence Poles should seek.[736] Göhrke and Knesebeck concluded that Poles were reasonable, and reported that they generally acknowledged that Poland could not hope to obtain "complete independence". Debate centered on whether Germany, or Austria-Hungary, would make a better patron.[737]

They assured Berlin that Germany could prevail in this debate and win the lasting loyalty of the Polish nation. Again, Göhrke and Knesebeck believed that Polish political sentiment could be effectively manipulated through elite intermediaries. The masses, they argued, "have demonstrated in their undisturbed development, despite their strong participation [in political matters], a strong willingness to submit to the directives of their self-appointed directors and leaders", whether those were bourgeois nationalists or extreme socialists.[738] The pair also relayed reports from trustworthy sources that support for the Austro-Polish solution was rapidly eroding in Congress Poland and that some Poles stated that, "If we once again must attach ourselves to a great power, than that damned German *Ordnung* is still preferable to us Poles than the Austrian sloppiness".[739] The policemen reported that political disposition of the urban population had already significantly improved in the past months, with outright "hostility to Germany" receding considerably.[740] The pair concluded, that Berlin could forge sufficiently broad and effective relationships with the Polish political classes to secure the German Empire's interests in the new state.[741] The apparent success of the German occupation of Congress Poland, in short, had convinced even the Police President of Posen of the plausibility, and long-term integrity, of a German-Polish union.

Negotiations with Vienna and Drafting Plans for Union with Poland

Having achieved a broad consensus on Polish policy among the major imperial agencies in the early spring of 1916, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg turned to coordinating action and policy in Berlin and Warsaw to realize a German-Polish union. Vienna's claims to Congress Poland, and its continuing occupation presence in the South-East remained, for the moment, Bethmann Hollweg's primary obstacle to establishing German suzerainty. In a letter to Falkenhayn and the Kaiser sent on 10 April, the Chancellor spelled out what outcomes he believed Germany should be willing to accept from negotiations with Austria-Hungary. Bethmann Hollweg's preferred outcome, he made clear, was the acquisition of "the whole of Congress Poland" as an "autonomous" state under German suzerainty, as it would most effectively stabilize German interests in the region and prevent competition for influence.[742] The Chancellor, however, doubted that Vienna would accept this solution and therefore proposed a backup.[743] Negotiations, he feared, would ultimately settle on partition of the region between Germany and Austria-Hungary, in which case he argued that the German Empire should still forge an "Grand Duchy of Warsaw" under German suzerainty from its partition.[744] This, he hoped, would still win Polish fidelity to the German Empire, and given Berlin a better political position in the increasingly likely struggle with Austria-Hungary over the final fate of Poland. Falkenhayn added his own notes, generally agreeing with the Chancellor's assessment, but suggesting that a "Grand Duchy of Warsaw" might be a useful negotiating tactic to gradually introduce the idea of German suzerainty to Vienna.[745] The Kaiser and Jagow approved of Falkenhayn's notion, and otherwise signed off on

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[736] Ibid., 381.
[737] Ibid., 383.
[738] Ibid., 380.
[739] Ibid., 383.
[740] Ibid., 385.
[741] Ibid., 387.
[742] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Karl Georg von Treutler, 10 April 1916," April 10, 1916, 230, R21656, PA AA.
[743] Ibid.
[744] Ibid., 228–29. Fischer briefly refers to this plan for partition, but mistakenly portrays it as another example of rampant annexationism. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 240.
[745] Karl Georg von Treutler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 12 April 1916," April 12, 1916, 235, R21656, PA AA.

Bethmann Hollweg's priorities.[746]

In mid-April, Berlin initiated negotiations with Vienna with the aim of finally securing Austrian divestment from Congress Poland. The Chancellor declined Falkenhayn's advice and instead frankly laid out Berlin's aims. Bethmann Hollweg first suggested "the formation of an autonomous state under a firm military and economic connection with Germany" in negotiations with Burián on 16 April.[747] The first meeting ended at loggerheads, with Bethmann Hollweg refusing to rescind the empire's demand for suzerainty over all of Congress Poland, and Burián refusing to accept it. The Chancellor indicated that if Vienna could not accept a German-Polish union, Burián should return with a counter-offer, or a demand for appropriate compensation.[748] This was indeed a shrewd tactic and Jagow commented that, if partition became inevitable, the Foreign Office was already contemplating the details of a press campaign to effectively saddle Vienna with the "odium" for the decision to once again mangle the Polish nation.[749]

The opening salvo of negotiations, however, did not satisfy Beseler, who did not have Jagow's faith that Berlin would be able to control the narrative in the event of partition. On 22 April Beseler sent word to the Chancellor, insisting that multinational imperialism could only work if Germany could forge an autonomous state from all of Congress Poland. A truncated country would hardly win the gratitude or fidelity of Polish national elites. Partition would invariably result in a new race between the empires to effectively wield Polish irredentism and there would be no guarantee that Poles would side with the German Empire.[750] Controlling all of Congress Poland, he continued, was indispensible both for the German Empire's military security and its political stability. Germany needed to be able to effectively stymie foreign intervention and sponsorship of subversive nationalist movements.[751] Whether or not Beseler's admonition directly effected Bethmann Hollweg's designs, the Chancellor continued to pursue a full German-Polish union. In May and June, both he and Jagow instructed Germany's ambassador to pressure Vienna to divest from Congress Poland.[752]

Vienna's reaction to their ally's sudden demand for Congress Poland is telling. Austria-Hungary claimed to be completely unsurprised. In a letter of complaint on 29 April, the Austrian embassy acknowledged its disappointment and frustration but admitted that they had seen this coming for some time. They referred to the visible and important multinationalist factions within the German government: Erzberger's organizations and multinationalists in the Chancellery, to name a few.[753] Vienna claimed that its reports on political discussions in Berlin had long indicated that the Foreign Office had been working to realize the "foundation of an autonomous Polish state". "Naturally this new Kingdom was to stand under the military and political suzerainty of Germany" they concluded.[754] Having perceived growing support for multinational imperialism in Berlin for several months, Vienna was unruffled when Germany stated its demands. Their foreknowledge confirms that the German Empire's final adoption of a multinational imperial paradigm in the spring 1916 represented the culmination of long debates over imperial aims and models of ethnic management and not a mercurial decision prompted by wartime emergency.

As the Foreign Office and Chancellery continued negotiations with Vienna, the State Secretary of the Imperial Office of the Interior, Clemens von Delbrück, left office. Karl Helfferich replaced him and also assumed the position of Vice Chancellor. In early July Beseler received Helfferich to read him in on Polish policy, and give him a tour of occupied Poland. After surveying conditions, Helfferich agreed with Beseler's preferred imperial program for

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[746] Knesebeck, "Report to the Imperial Chancellery, 7 December 1915," 261; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 240.
[747] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Letter to Gerhard von Mutius, 26 April 1916," April 26, 1916, 175, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[748] Gottlieb von Jagow, "Telegram to Karl Georg von Treutler, 16 April 1916," April 16, 1916, 275, R21656, BArch.
[749] Ibid.
[750] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 22 April 1916," April 22, 1916, 300–301, R21656, PA AA.
[751] Ibid., 299–304.
[752] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 242.
[753] Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, "Austro-Hungarian Letter of Protest," 33–34.
[754] Ibid., 34.

Congress Poland.[755]

In a 23 July 1916 report to the Kaiser, Beseler detailed his plans to establish a Polish state as Germany's "bulwark" against Russia.[756] The political stability of the region, Beseler reminded his sovereign, depended on negotiation with, and the satisfaction of, Polish nationalists. National elites would accept a solution which established Polish statehood and guaranteed Polish control over education, cultural policies, and domestic governance.[757] To assure the population of Berlin's respect of Polish autonomy, he recommended establishing a Polish national army under Warsaw's peacetime command, whose organization and training would conform to the Prussian army's.[758] If granted these concessions, Beseler believed that the Polish population would accept German suzerainty, in particular Berlin's jurisdiction over a single German-Polish foreign policy and the Kaiser's right to inspect the Polish army and assume the supreme command of the united armed forces in the event of war.[759] To further secure the legitimacy of the German-Polish union, he recommended establishing "standing federal committee", in which appointed delegates of the German Empire, Poland, and any other attached states could discuss and binding decisions on "common matters".[760] Beseler's proposal, in essence, closely mirrored German federalism in both the confederal basis of its legitimacy and constitutional organization. Provisions for railways, telegraphy, and postal coordination for the proposed German-Polish union all reproduced compromises already established between the German federal states four decades before.

Beseler firmly believed that the Kingdom of Poland would function as a strategic asset, not a threat. He therefore insisted on expanding its territory as far eastward into Russia as final peace negotiations would allow. This, he reported would ensure the economic development of the new state, making for a "viable" and "potent" military ally.[761] Beseler considered minor annexations in the north of Poland, along the Bobr and Narew line, necessary for the project, but in no way supported aggressive Germanization, much less the ethnic cleansing of the territory.[762] Minor border adjustments, he clarified, were needed to ensure Germany's "mastery over all of Poland", as well as secure routes by which the German armies could rapidly deploy to reinforce Poland's eastern frontier from attack.[763]

Beseler felt confident that Poles would loyally serve a German-Polish union and in time regard it as legitimate. Primarily, Beseler believed that Poles would greet the autonomy provided by the new state as the fulfillment of their most urgent national wishes.[764] Having received self-governance, Polish leaders would recognize that the suzerainty of the German Empire was now indispensible to protecting their state from Russian aggression. Indeed, the Governor General believed that the population of Congress Poland was beginning to abandon their sympathies for the Austro-Hungarian empire precisely because the Habsburg military had proven so mediocre in the course of the war.[765] Beseler also planned to cultivate influence over key elites, the Roman Catholic clergy in particular, in order to gradually improve the reputation of the German Empire among the Polish masses.[766] Beseler's confidence in Polish fidelity to a German-Polish union was thus profoundly future-oriented. He harbored no illusions that the residents of Congress Poland currently sympathized with Berlin, or would develop such attitudes quickly. He therefore

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[755] Karl Helfferich, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 13 July 1916," July 13, 1916, 72, N30/12, BArch.
[756] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 23 July 1916," July 23, 1916, 127, N30/9, BArch.
[757] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 41.
[758] Ibid., 74; von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 23 July 1916," 124.
[759] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 41, 74.
[760] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 23 July 1916," 124.
[761] Ibid., 123–24.
[762] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 41–42.
[763] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 23 July 1916," 124.
[764] Ibid., 123–25.
[765] Ibid.
[766] Ibid., 122.

strongly discouraged plans to recruit a Polish army for the current war effort.[767]

In July 1916, the Kaiser conferred with military commanders at Pleß, and confirmed plans to resolve the Polish question according to Beseler's scheme for a German-Polish union.[768] This confirmation was basically a formality. Negotiations with Vienna continued as before.

At the same time, Helfferich and the RAI began seriously contemplating the details of Poland's future constitution.[769] On 5 August, the Chancellor instructed Beseler to produce working designs for the Kingdom of Poland's state administration, its constitution, and treaties governing its relationship with the German Empire. He commissioned the RAI's Constitutional Consultant [*Verfassungsreferent*], Dr. Schulze, to assist Warsaw in the matter.[770] The consultations produced a draft fundamental law, submitted by Kries, and circulated by the Chancellor in November 1916.[771] RAI and GGW planners specified that the German-Polish relationship would be governed by treaties of union, as well as articles inscribed into both the Polish and German constitutions.[772] Treaties would establish an "eternal alliance for the mutual defense" of Germany and Poland, while conferring the right to represent the Kingdom of Poland in international affairs to the German Empire. The draft treaty also laid out the federal military relationship between the two states, and identified the Kaiser's role as supreme commander in the eve of war.[773] The constitutional drafts actually surpassed Beseler's July suggestion for a "standing federal committee" to govern the union and instead recommended essentially incorporating Poland as a junior federal state. Namely, initial drafts specified that the Kingdom of Poland would be entitled to six representatives to the Bundesrat, and sixty seats in the Reichstag, though the latter would only be permitted to vote on common tariff and economic issues.[774] The initial draft of the Polish constitution further designated a Wettin candidate for the throne, and indicated that, in case of dynastic extinction, the Bundesrat would select and appropriate candidate for the Polish throne.[775] This extremely federal version of the German-Polish union generally met with Helfferich's approval.[776]

As negotiations with Vienna continued in the late summer and autumn of 1916, Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler both concentrated their efforts on convincing those factions in the Prussian government and Reichstag who still opposed a multinationalist approach. Both the parameters of this imperial model, and the arguments used to support it, remained consistent with internal discussions among the military, imperial leadership, and Kaiser. They represent the definitive program of aims for Congress Poland, as conceived of by Germany's imperial leadership in 1916. In early August, Bethmann Hollweg officially presented the Chancellery's proposal for a German-Polish union to the assembled Bundesrat.[777] Aside from laying out Berlin's plan to establish an autonomous Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty, and its benefits for securing Eastern Europe, the Chancellor also explained that the plan would require limiting annexations to only Suwałki. He abandoned claims for the Narew and Warta lines and assured the plenipotentiaries that the deportation of Polish residents would be incompatible with the multinationalist project.[778] Geiss has suggested, with little evidence, that Bethmann Hollweg's renunciation of broader annexations was dishonest.[779] However, his restraint matches internal policy discussions in spirit, if not in specifics. Moreover, the Chancellor's subsequent presentation to the Prussian *Staatsministerium* confirms that imperial leadership genuinely

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[767] Ibid., 125.
[768] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 75.
[769] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 450.
[770] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 5 August 1916," August 5, 1916, 103–4, N30/12, BArch.
[771] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 451.
[772] Theodor Lewald, "Draft of Proposed Treaty with Poland," November 16, 1916, 190, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[773] Ibid., 189–90.
[774] Ibid., 189.
[775] Ibid., 191.
[776] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 452.
[777] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 107.
[778] Ibid.
[779] Ibid., 107–9.

planned to annex only Suwałki from Congress Poland.

The Chancellor's meeting with the Prussian *Staatsministerium* was scheduled in response to a final act of defiance by Minister Loebell against the swelling tide of multinational imperialism. On 29 September he organized a petition, signed by some of the most powerful men in the Prussian government, denouncing the attempt to establish an "autonomous Poland".[780] The petition once more asserted that Poland would invariably betray the German Empire and that a Polish state would merely shelter and support nationalist agitation in Prussia. "The Polish irredenta," it argued, "would thereby become great and would Polonize our bilingual lands more and more".[781] In a moment of German weakness, the signators feared, Warsaw would solicit Russian backing for a crusade of national redemption against Prussia.[782] Instead, they called for a program of large annexations along the border with Poland. The author did not bother to recommend Germanizing or purging this space, but instead assumed that its 3 million residents would be integrated into the German body politic.[783] In addition to Loebell, the Prussian Minister of Public Works Paul von Breitenbach, the Minister of Agriculture Baron Clemens von Schorlemer-Lieser, and the Minister of Finance August Lentze, all signed the petition, as did a smattering of Landtag representatives.

The Chancellor reacted quickly to the insurgency. On 2 October Bethmann Hollweg invited Beseler, Kries, and Hindenburg to speak to the assembled Prussian *Staatsministerium* and the leadership of Germany's political parties.[784] They were to convince each audience of the wisdom of a German-Polish union and "especially to establish" that failing to build a Polish state would actually be more likely to provoke a Polish "irredenta".[785] Conversely, he wanted to emphasize the strategic advantages of an "autonomous Poland", and assure their audience that this model of imperialism would not destabilize the "domestic German Polish question".[786]

Beseler and Bethmann Hollweg together presented their case for a German-Polish union to a plenary session of the Prussian *Staatsministerium* on 8 October 1916.[787] The Governor General of course addressed and refuted the idea that Poles lacked a "state-building" capacity.[788] Beseler emphasized his belief that multinational represented the only viable option for securing Germany's eastern frontier from a future Russian "inundation" and his hope that a Polish army would considerably reinforce the German Empire's own military resources.[789] In case of war with Russia, German units would march into Poland and fight "shoulder to shoulder" with their Polish comrades.[790] He therefore endorsed a strong Kingdom of Poland, which encompassed not only Congress Poland, but also parts of Lithuania and White Russia.[791] For similar reasons, Beseler hoped that Germany would invest in Polish economic and infrastructural development after the war.[792] "Dependence" upon Germany, Beseler assured his audience, would be "acceptable" to Polish nationalists so long as they had reasonable guarantees for their own autonomy.[793] He stressed that Poland would rely on the security offered by German arms, without which Congress Poland could not hope to survive.[794] While admitting that the population generally disliked

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[780] Paul von Breitenbach and Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, "Petition of Prussian Ministers and Various German Representatives Regarding the Future of Poland, 29 September 1916," September 29, 1916, 48, N30/13, BArch.
[781] Ibid., 49.
[782] Ibid., 50.
[783] Ibid., 49.
[784] Gerhard von Mutius, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 2 October 1916," October 2, 1916, 51–52, N30/13, BArch; Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 2 October 1916," October 2, 1916, 53–54, N30/13, BArch.
[785] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 2 October 1916," 53.
[786] Ibid.
[787] Prussian Staatsministerium, "Minutes Staatsministerium Meeting Regarding the Polish Question, 8 October 1916," October 8, 1916, 130, N30/13, BArch.
[788] Ibid., 135.
[789] Ibid., 131–33.
[790] Ibid., 133.
[791] Ibid., 131.
[792] Ibid., 134.
[793] Ibid., 132.
[794] Ibid., 133.

Germany, Beseler had faith that the German Empire could win its fidelity with time.[795] He recommended only minimal annexations in the north of the country.[796]

Beseler's presentation had a remarkable impact on the Prussian *Staatsministerium*, which had, presumably, been predominantly under Loebell's influence to this point. With the exception of Loebell himself, the Ministers defected en masse and endorsed the multinationalist project. Especially gratifying to the Governor General must have been the approval of the Prussian Justice Minister, Hans's older brother, Maximilian von Beseler, who agreed that suzerainty appeared to be Germany's best option for Poland.[797] Lentze, the Finance Minister decided to "revise" his initial resistance, as did the Minister of Public Works, and Vice-President of the *Staatsministerium*, Breitenbach, who complimented Beseler on his "impressive" presentation.[798] The Minister of War, Adolf Wild von Hohenborn gave qualified support for Beseler's program, calling it the "least terrible" alternative. Even Schorlemer-Lieser, the Minister of Agriculture, admitted that, despite his concerns on Polish Statehood's effects on Germany, imperial policy dictated an adjustment to "the present Prussian Polish policy".[799] By the end of the meeting, Loebell alone vocally opposed the creation of a German-Polish union, on the grounds that he did not trust Polish nationalism.[800] Palpably isolated, Loebell aired his final objections, offered some minor recommendations, and then let the matter rest.[801]

On the same day, Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler repeated their presentation for the leadership the Reichstag's political parties. Their presentation again focused on the long-term strategic advantages and plausibility of suzerainty. Their arguments met with a similar degree of success. Predictably, the FVP and Zentrum, the core of multinationalist support, enthusiastically backed the government's imperial model. The Zentrum party chairman, Felix Porsch, gave unequivocal support to Beseler's "difficult" but necessary project. The German Empire, he agreed, needed to control Congress Poland, and multinational imperialism represented the only viable model of rule.[802] Otto Wiemer, Porsch's counterpart in the FVP, agreed that there remained "Only the one way, which Beseler has described".[803] The SPD leadership was less enthusiastic, though no less supportive. The SPD publically despised Russian autocracy. At least some in its ranks wanted to improve Germany's strategic position on the continent, and a German-Polish union promised to foreclose the alternative possibility of large annexations and accompanying coercive policies of ethnic management.[804] After some discussion, the Free Conservative and National Liberal parties offered their grudging support for a German-Polish union, admitting that Beseler's presentation had resolved their "foundational concerns".[805] Only the Conservatives refused to budge from their opposition.[806]

In August 1916, German negotiations with the Austro-Hungarian government also accelerated. By then Berlin held a much stronger negotiating position. In the wake of Austria-Hungary's embarrassing performance holding the line against the Brusilov Offensive, Vienna was more obviously dependent upon the German Empire than ever. At the same time, with Austro-Hungarian reserves of manpower virtually exhausted, the prospect of a Polish entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers, however remote, was powerfully enticing. German negotiators pressed to secure Austria-Hungary's agreement to establish a Polish state, its sanction of Germany's Suzerainty over said state, and Vienna's surrender of its administrative

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[795] Ibid., 135.
[796] Ibid., 133.
[797] Ibid., 142–43.
[798] Ibid., 139, 142.
[799] Ibid., 142.
[800] Ibid., 136.
[801] Ibid., 143–45.
[802] Chancellery, "Minutes of Meeting Between Beseler, Bethmann Hollweg, and Reichstag Party Leaders, 9 October 1916," October 9, 1916, 39, NL Jagow 3, PA AA.
[803] Ibid.
[804] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 53.
[805] Ibid.; Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Paul von Hindenburg, 10 October 1916," October 10, 1916, 71, N30/13, BArch.
[806] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 53.

responsibilities over the Government General of Lublin to German authorities during the war. On 12 August 1916, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg conferred with the Austrian Foreign Minister in Vienna to renegotiate Poland's future status. Here Bethmann-Hollweg secured Austria's agreement to establish a Kingdom of Poland with its own dynastic monarchy and constitution.[807] The Chancellor and Burián agreed that Poland would exist as a satellite state and could not be permitted to "direct its own foreign policy" in the future.[808] At this point the negotiators agreed that "in respect to Foreign Policy, Poland will be attached to the Alliance of the two Empires".[809] Although the Chancellor insisted that Prussia annex Suwałki, he otherwise established Germany's position in favor of a large Polish state, expanded as far to the east as peace negotiations would allow, possibly even inclusive of Wilna.[810] Most importantly, Bethmann Hollweg also began to secure Germany's predominant influence over Polish military matters. The negotiators agreed that Poland would necessarily possess its own national army, to be organized and trained by a military commission composed of representatives from both of the allied empires.[811] However, Burián agreed to petition his government to cede "supreme leadership of the [Polish] army" to the German Empire.[812] Bethmann-Hollweg pushed for more, proposing the absorption of Poland into the German *Zollgebiet*, but here Burián demurred, insisting that the two empires retain equal economic access to the region.[813] The Vienna Conference thus established the basic framework for Germany's Polish policies, and achieved its most pressing objectives. Burián had, in principle, agreed that Austria-Hungary would not absorb Congress Poland, and that Poland would be incorporated into *Mitteleuropa* as an autonomous satellite state enlarged by Russian territory to the East. While Austria-Hungary still claimed a role in this Polish condominium, it was clear even at this point that the German Empire would be the senior partner, and Bethmann-Hollweg and Burián established the possibility of a direct German-Polish union within the framework of *Mitteleuropa*.

The *Reichsleitung*, Foreign Office, and German military leadership subsequently applied unrelenting pressure to Vienna to ensure that Austria-Hungary publicly abandoned its claims to Polish territory and accepted Germany's program to build a German-Polish union. Only a month after rising to the position of First Quartermaster General of the OHL, Ludendorff personally intervened on behalf of Beseler's policy. On 27 September 1916 he wrote to Major General Hans von Seeckt, at the time serving as the Chief of Staff for the Austro-Hungarian Seventh Army und Archduke Karl. Ludendorff begged Seeckt to convince the Habsburg heir apparent to abandon Austrian claims to Congress Poland with haste, writing that "the clarification of Polish relations allows no hesitation, if we are to exploit the military strength of Poland".[814] Ludendorff further emphasized to Seeckt that Germany's objectives could only be achieved by bringing Poland into "unified military and political dependence on Germany".[815]

Only three days later, Hindenburg threw his own weight behind the multinationalist project. As the newly anointed head of the OHL, Hindenburg personally wrote to Hötzendorff, demanding that the Austro-Hungarian Empire publicly relinquish its claims to Congress Poland and begin handing over administrative control of the GGL to Warsaw.[816] Administrative divestment was particularly important, as Hindenburg wanted no remaining avenue for Austrian influence. Whereas Poland represented a peripheral interest to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hindenburg argued, Berlin was naturally "more interested" in the fate of Congress Poland because the region was strategically indispensible for the German Empire. Congress Poland, he

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[807] Reichskanzlei, "Allgemeine Aufzeichnung Über Die Polnische Frage," 1917, 1–2, R43/2477, BArch.
[808] Chancellery, "Record of the Vienna Conference, 11-12 August 1916," August 12, 1916, 4, R43/2477, BArch.
[809] Ibid.
[810] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 13 August 1916," August 13, 1916, 119, N30/12, BArch.
[811] Chancellery, "Record of the Vienna Conference, 11-12 August 1916," 4.
[812] Ibid.
[813] Ibid.
[814] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Hans von Seeckt, 27 September 1916," September 27, 1916, 4, N247/57, BArch.
[815] Ibid.
[816] Paul von Hindenburg, "Letter to Conrad von Hötzendorff, 30 September 1916," September 30, 1916, 53, N30/10, BArch.

continued, must be "under the military influence of Germany alone" and exist in military union with the German Empire.[817]

On 18 October, German and Austro-Hungarian representatives again conferred over the fate of Poland at Pleß. Here German negotiators finally secured Berlin's claims to future hegemony over Poland.[818] In preparatory discussions, Beseler, Hindenburg, and Bethmann Hollweg had agreed that they needed to secure Germany's exclusive authority over the deployment and training of the Polish army, and Vienna's concession that Germany would eventually have sole influence over the Kingdom of Poland. They could not accept joint military commands or a political condominium.[819] German negotiators achieved these aims at the conference. For the sake of appearances, Austro-Hungarian officers would assist in training the initial cadres of the Polish army. However, Vienna ceded ultimate responsibility for training the Polish military to the GGW. They also agreed that the organization of Poland's future national army would conform to the standards, structures, and equipment of the Prussian army, in effect granting the Kaiser the right of inspection over the Polish national army.[820] Austro-Hungarian representatives also agreed in principle to German demands to unify the occupation administration Congress Poland. They promised to send a delegation to the GGW to "gradually transition the management of both occupation territories to a uniform legislation and administrative practice".[821] The subsequent Pleß agreement, promulgated on 3 November, confirmed Germany's leading role in Poland.[822]

Conclusion

By the end of October 1916, therefore, the German Empire had committed to a program of multinational imperialism in Poland. Military and Civilian policy-makers intended to forge a German-Polish union, and had effectively secured Vienna's tentative divestment from claims over Congress Poland. By this point, consensus in favor of a multinational imperial program was overwhelming throughout the German government. Kaiser Wilhelm II had been sympathetic to the project for over a year, and had finally signed off on a German-Polish union in July. In the Chancellery, a multinationalist faction around Kurt Riezler had endorsed a German-Polish union since August 1915, but had explored multinationalism much longer. Bethmann Hollweg had contemplated multinational imperialism since the beginning of the war, seriously entertaining the idea of Polish statehood since August 1915, and finally committing to a German-Polish union in January 1916. His State Secretaries of the RAI supported him. By September 1915, Delbrück had concluded that German suzerainty was the only plausible remaining way to achieve German interests in the region. His successor, Karl Helfferich, was easily convinced to support a German-Polish union.

The Foreign Office had reached a similarly adamantine consensus. Wilhelmstraße had also harbored an influential multinationalist faction since the beginning of the war. Gerhard von Mutius had principally supported multinational imperialism in 1914 and proved a sympathetic ally of Beseler. The close working relationship with the *Zentralstelle* exposed Foreign Office policy-makers to the multinationalist sympathies of Matthias Erzberger and his committee of experts on the Russian Empire: Paul Rohrbach, Axel Schmidt, and Theodor Schiemann. State Secretary Jagow initially doubted the possibility of reconciling German and Polish interests. Positive reports on the political situation in Congress Poland ultimately convinced him otherwise. By February he supported a German-Polish union in principle. The German ambassador to Vienna, Tschirschky, proved yet more recalcitrant, but by April 1916 he abandoned support for an Austro-Polish solution in favor of multinational union with Poland.

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[817] Ibid., 55.
[818] Reichskanzlei, "Allgemeine Aufzeichnung Über Die Polnische Frage," 2.
[819] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Paul von Hindenburg, 15 October 1916," October 15, 1916, 70–72, N30/10, BArch; Paul von Hindenburg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 15 October 1916," October 14, 1916, 73, N30/10, BArch.
[820] Reichskanzlei, "Allgemeine Aufzeichnung Über Die Polnische Frage," 2.
[821] Chancellery, "Record of Pleß Negotiation, 18 October 1916," October 18, 1916, 7, R43/2477, BArch.
[822] Chancellery, "Pleßer Vereinbarung," November 3, 1916, 46–47, N30/21, BArch.

The Government General of Warsaw became the engine of multinationalist policy. Kries, already opposed to Germanization during the summer of 1915, had set occupation policy with the aim of building interethnic trust even before the Kaiser established the GGW. By spring 1916 Kries buoyantly endorsed the formation of a German-Polish union.[823] Several committed multinationalists shaped GGW policy, including Mutius and Cleinow, and Beseler soon became the most vocal champion of German suzerainty over Poland. In January 1916, Beseler began pushing Berlin to establish a German-Polish union.

Far from clinging to a program of annexations and Germanization, the leadership of the German army actually produced several key supporters of a German-Polish union. The OHL became an early and consistent node of multinational imperialism. Falkenhayn practically reignited serious discussion of a multinational program for Poland in the summer of 1915. His Deputy General Staff similarly produced a comprehensive plan for a multinational German-Polish union long before Beseler had committed to the model. Indeed, its memorandum was virtually identical to, and may well have inspired, Beseler's eventual program. Contrary to his usual portrayal of an obstinate annexationist, Ludendorff also became a firm supporter of a German-Polish union. Ludendorff was never as enthusiastic in his support of multinational imperialism as Beseler, nor did he desire to build a militarily powerful Polish state.[824] However, by October 1915, he considered multinational-union to be Germany's best option for Poland. Hindenburg proved more reluctant. However even he eventually lent his prestige to the project and campaigned for the establishment of a German-Polish union in the Reichstag and *Staatsministerium*. By September 1916, Beseler felt confident that he had the complete support of Hindenburg and Ludendorff for his Polish policy.[825]

The Prussian Government alone mounted sustained resistance to a multinationalist program, and even its line had yawning gaps in it. Prussian Interior Minister Loebell continued to press for the annexation of a border-strip of Polish territory through October 1916.[826] By then, however, he had become a voice in the wilderness. His fellow Prussian ministers accepted Berlin's multinationalist plans, many convinced by Beseler's arguments. Even Loebell's *Oberpräsidenten* wavered on how aggressively to press Germanization in the *Ostmark*. They were in no way inclined to provide unqualified support for nationalizing programs of ethnic management. Key personnel, like the Police President of Posen, had begun to tacitly endorse German suzerainty as the best strategy for governing Congress Poland. Though committed to an annexationist program, by the autumn of 1916 not even Loebell seemed to favor aggressive nationalization to secure new territory in Poland. The petition he organized in September 1916 did not even bother to mention major Germanization efforts.

The consensus in favor of multinational imperialism was above all based upon the Germans' faith in the long-term advantages and plausibility of this model of governing Polish space. Historians have often written of the project as a mercenary and potentially disingenuous ploy to put more warm bodies in the trenches, possibly in response to one of several acute crises in 1916. The Battle of Verdun, the Brusilov Offensive, and the entrance of Romania into the war all foisted new demands on German manpower, already stretched to the limit.[827] Hindenburg and Ludendorff's massive mobilization of labor in autumn 1916 sought to mitigate this attrition. Because it roughly coincided with the adoption of multinationalist policy in Poland, historians have generally conflated the two initiatives.

However, the possibility of recruiting Polish units during the war does not appear to have materially affected most policy-makers' decisions about whether or not to establish a Polish state under German suzerainty. For one, none of the acute manpower emergencies cited above

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[823] Wolfgang von Kries, "Cover Letter for Cleinow's Memorandum, Addressed to Governor General von Beseler," June 14, 1916, 46, N30/35, BArch.
[824] In particular, Ludendorff did not share Beseler's desire to expand the Kingdom of Poland eastward. See below.
[825] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 3 September 1916," September 3, 1916, 56, N30/54, BArch; Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Clara von Beseler, 28 September 1916," September 28, 1916, 60, N30/54, BArch.
[826] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 272.
[827] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 73.

coincide with the timeline of major policy-makers declaring their support for a German-Polish union. The earliest of these emergencies, the Battle of Verdun, opened in February of 1916, after the Chancellery, key figures in the Foreign Office, and much of the military had already declared their interest in the project. Falkenhayn's initial interest in a multinationalist solution for Poland did mention the possible recruitment of Polish units, and perhaps reflected the Chief of Staff's concern over chronic manpower shortages. But his interest in a German-Polish union persisted even after Beseler and the Chancellor repeatedly deflated his hopes for wartime recruitment.

Indeed, internal debate over the wisdom of building a Polish state under German suzerainty focused almost exclusively on the long-term reliability of such a state, and its impact on German domestic politics. The prospect of wartime recruitment was certainly mentioned, but relatively rarely, and hardly ever as the central point of contention. Even the most optimistic projections for the number of soldiers to be recruited from Congress Poland would be meaningless if German policy-makers did not believe these troops could be relied upon to serve the interests of the German Empire. Though optimistic that Germany could eventually build a faithful Kingdom of Poland, Bethmann Hollweg believed that the population was too politically apathetic or afraid of betraying their Russian sovereign to provide frontline soldiers during the war. Indeed, Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler sold the project of German-Polish union to the Kaiser in July 1916 with the explicit caveat that it represented a long-term strategic solution, and could not be used to bolster Germany's current manpower.

Manpower strains, especially after the losses on the Eastern Front over the summer of 1916 did impact *how* Germany implemented its plan. In the immediate wake of the Brusilov offensive, commanders within the German army reopened the question of wartime Polish recruitment. Ludendorff drafted a letter to Undersecretary Zimmermann in the Foreign Office. Explicitly citing the heavy losses inflicted by the Russian offensive, he strongly reaffirmed his prior support for the creation of what he referred to as a "Grand Principality of Poland" and the raising of a Polish army under German leadership.[828] After his elevation into the OHL, Ludendorff instructed his successor at Ober Ost, Max Hoffmann, to cooperate with the establishment of a Polish state under German suzerainty, as he hoped this would be the foundation for recruiting a Polish army for the Central Powers.[829] Falkenhayn also resumed badgering Beseler about the possibility of wartime recruitment in July, repeatedly asking if it was possible and advisable.[830] Nearly identical queries followed from the War Ministry in August.[831] Manpower considerations also secured the support of otherwise reluctant figures, such as Hindenburg, who in October 1916 justified the creation of a Polish state based upon Germany's urgent need for the "complete utilization of Polish manpower" for the war effort.[832]

Throughout the summer of 1916 Beseler worked to temper expectations for recruitment. On 2 August, the Governor General sent a letter to both Bethmann Hollweg and Falkenhayn. He agreed that it would be desirable to employ the "considerable military power of Poland" during the war. But he considered it doubtful that any sizeable Polish army could be trained for the current war, even if it could be recruited. He instead recommended investing in long-term state-buildings efforts in Poland.[833] Falkenhayn responded by reaffirming his commitment to the creation of Polish state "with military attachment to Germany", but otherwise ignored Beseler's advice, insisting the Governor General begin preparing for a recruitment drive based on voluntary enlistment.[834] On 23 August, Beseler again cautioned Falkenhayn against mobilizing Poland for the current war. This time he emphasized that, although he believed Poland would

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[828] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 35.
[829] Ibid.
[830] Erich von Falkenhayn, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 21 July 1916," July 21, 1916, 3–4, N30/10, BArch.
[831] von Wrizberg, "War Ministry Inquiry on the Advisability of Recruiting Volunteer Polish Units, 7 August 1916," August 7, 1916, 23, N30/10, BArch.
[832] Paul von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg," October 13, 1916, 74–75, N30/10, BArch.
[833] von Beseler, "Report to Falkenhayn and Bethmann Hollweg, 2 August 1916," 13–15.
[834] Erich von Falkenhayn, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, August 1916," August 1916, 24, N30/10, BArch.

loyally defend a German-Polish union in the future, many Poles did not wish to involve themselves in the current war.[835] No magic recruitment slogan, he argued, would make Polish Russians flock to the German colors.[836] Beseler further warned that a German-Polish union would only succeed if Poles believed that it represented the convergence of a common interest in the "struggle against Russia". A blatantly mercenary call for soldiers, he feared, could threaten this trust.[837] Beseler reluctantly agreed to begin preparations for organizing, training, and equipping and Polish national army, if Berlin demanded it, but he also cautioned that the army must remain smaller than Germany's own occupation force for the duration of the war. He did not want any surprises in Germany's rear staging areas.[838]

Ultimately, the military's growing demands for fresh sources of manpower prevailed against Beseler's warnings. The decision was made to begin the recruitment of a Polish national army soon after announcing Polish statehood. This, however, was a secondary question of implementation, and did not determine Berlin's reasons for pursuing a German-Polish union.

Instead, German military and civilian leaders ultimately decided to establish a Polish state under German suzerainty for essentially the same reasons propounded by contemporary multinationalist publicists. This logic apparently sat quite comfortably with the institutional cultures of Germany's various imperial agencies. As with multinationalists in the public sphere, German policy-makers assumed that Poland was a civilized and *staatsfähig* nation. Neither career experience in Africa nor ideological sympathy for colonialism appear to have affected how policy-makers evaluated Polish culture, nor rendered them more disposed to support nationalizing models of empire. Karl Helfferich had begun his career in the Foreign Office working for the colonial department. Rechenberg had served as the Governor of East Africa. He, along with Bethmann Hollweg and Erzberger, had supported the expansion of colonial holdings in Africa either before or during the war.[839] Despite this, all became instrumental supporters of multinational imperialism in Poland because they considered the Polish nation civilized, capable of organizing resistance to German repression, and simultaneously worthy of preservation.

The widespread recognition of Polish political competence, and not stereotypes of primitivity or barbarity, became the founding assumptions of imperial policy towards Poland during the war. Indeed, Beseler's presentation to the leadership of Germany's political parties on 8 October was framed by the assumption that Poles were capable of self-governance, and thus a potentially valuable ally or dangerous enemy.[840] This was the same argument he had presented to the Kaiser. In fact, almost nobody in the German government propounded the idea that Poles were primitive. Nationalizing imperialists rarely employed the language of primitivity in official contexts, and more often than not, they based their own arguments on the possibility that Poland might constitute a credible threat to the German Empire. Some voices in the government indeed doubted whether anybody took rhetoric of Polish inadequacy seriously. Cleinow noted that "The evaluation of the Polish Nation as a viable, forward-looking force is hardly contested by any side. However, opinions may differ as to whether this power could ever be adapted to German interests".[841] He instead noted that many in Germany feared that Poland "could be the ruling nation [*beherrschendes Volk*] of Eastern Europe", and a "danger" for the German Empire.[842]

Confidence in German federalism proved foundational to building support among military and civilian leaders for a German-Polish union. The German Empire's own narrative of federalist legitimacy closely paralleled the grand bargain used to justify a German-Polish union. This familiarity made it easier for policy-makers to accept the potential advantages of a German-Polish union, even as it gave them confidence that Poland would accept German suzerainty as

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[835] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 23 August 1916," August 23, 1916, 29, N30/10, BArch.
[836] Ibid.
[837] Ibid., 30.
[838] Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, "Austro-Hungarian Letter of Protest," 33.
[839] Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, 313.
[840] Prussian Staatsministerium, "Staatsministerium Minutes, 8 October 1916," 135–36.
[841] Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 47–48.
[842] Ibid., 76.

necessary to defend their own autonomy. Like the federal German Empire, supporters of the policy self-consciously framed German suzerainty as establishing a mutually advantageous bulwark against Russian expansionism, allowing both Berlin and Warsaw to better defend their own autonomy.[843] The success of Germany's own federalist constitution underwrote most multinationalist proposals for Poland. As Beseler noted, "The German tribes have beat on each other's skulls more than Germans and Poles have. There is therefore no reason why this antagonism [between Germans and Poles] should not be able to develop into a peaceful coexistence over the course of time".[844]

The grand bargain of autonomy for federal integration became the intellectual core of the German Polish union.[845] So central was this bargain to the concept of multinational imperialism, that Beseler repeatedly insisted that Poles must be given authentic "national and cultural independence" and the "formation of a nation-state" to expect their fidelity to German rule.[846] If given autonomy, however, he believed that would almost invariably come to rely on Berlin. On 5 September, he optimistically described Polish political sentiment to Bethmann Hollweg.

> Irrespective of the those yet present, undeniable, and not un-important countercurrents, one can say that the country 1) does not want to fall back to Russia, 2) wants to form an autonomous state, and 3) wants to attach itself to Germany.[847]

Occupation intelligence identified the German Empire's apparent military competence and ability to defend the Kingdom of Poland as a key reason why Poles might prefer German sponsorship to that of Austria-Hungary.[848]

Given the confidence of German policy-makers in federalism, it should come as little surprise how readily many civilian leaders proposed simply integrating Poland into Germany's existing federal institutions. Some outright recommended incorporating a new Kingdom of Poland as the empire's 27th federal state.[·] Both GGW planners and RAI officials ultimately opted for a mediated course, furnishing the future Kingdom of Poland with Bundesrat representation but either excluding it from the Reichstag or limiting the competence of their representatives.[849] Though some might interpret such qualifications as discriminatory, these limitations also implied a more robust domestic autonomy for Poland. They recognized that Poland was a separate entity, upon whom Berlin could rely for military support, but for whom Berlin could not legislate.

Few policy-makers believed that the population of Congress Poland currently sympathized with the German Empire. Their confidence in the future fidelity of Warsaw to a German-Polish union instead stemmed from the practical strategic advantages of suzerainty, and their belief that Berlin would be able to relatively easily bend Polish political sentiment by manipulating relatively small cadres of cultural, social, and political elites. Even at the height of his optimism, Beseler never suggested that the majority of Congress Poland supported the German Empire or felt a "trace of gratitude" for their liberation from Russia.[850] The Pole, he emphasized, remained "foundationally hostile to Germany", and many would remain so for decades.[851] At best, policy-makers like Beseler believed the Polish population to be politically apathetic, or divided, enough that Berlin could still effectively maneuver and build flexible pro-imperial constituencies. They were also heartened by the apparent growth of support for German

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[843] Generalgouvernement Warschau, "Aufzeichnung Der Polnischen Frage, 6 August 1916," 126.
[844] Quoted in Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 38.
[845] "Minutes of Meeting in the Prussian Staatsministerium, 8 October 1916, Regarding the Polish Question," October 8, 1916, 131–33, N30/13, BArch.
[846] von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellor, 22 April 1916," 50.
[847] von Beseler, "Report to the Chancellor, 5 September 1916," 6.
[848] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report for July 1916," 134.
[·] 28th, if one counts the *Reichsland* of Alsace-Lorraine as a state.
[849] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Draft 'Staatsvertrag' for Germany and Poland," 127.
[850] von Beseler, "'Reinkonzept' Sent to the Chancellor, 2 March 1916," 30.
[851] Ibid.

leadership during the occupation.[852]

The occupation government worked closely with a growing collaborationist party in Congress Poland, but remained unimpressed with their popularity.[853] The autumn of 1916 saw a minor wave of enthusiastic agitation by Studnicki's *Klub* throughout German occupation zone, but long after German authorities had already decided on a multinational policy. In September 1916, Stunicki's Club of the Supporters of Polish Statehood publicly announced their endorsement of a German-sponsored Polish state, and their desire to forge a "fraternity of arms" with Germany as the basis for a "German-Polish *Ausgleich*" and a "standing confederation".[854] On 4 September, the Police President of Warsaw, Ernst von Glasenapp, reported that a public rally organized by the *Klub* had shown "greatest enthusiasm for the war against Russia" and agitated in support of joining it.[855] The occupation police and political departments closely tracked Polish reaction to the *Klub*'s statement of aims. Admitting that Endek's and other passivists had vehemently protested Studnicki's group, they nonetheless pointed with satisfaction to large crowds at *Klub* events who seemed to endorse the program of statehood and dependence on Germany.[856] Throughout September and October, Police Commissars throughout the GGW filed reports to Warsaw on successful and well-attended gatherings sponsored by the *Klub*.[857] They concluded that public opinion would swing behind Studnicki's platform with time, especially in the countryside where they believed Endek support to be weak.[858]

Only in October 1916 did Beseler perceive a fundamental shift in the political attitudes of the Polish population, moving in favor of German-Polish collaboration and abandoning Russian loyalism. Even then, however, he registered this as an initial and gradual change.[859] Sympathy for the German Empire was growing, not dominant. He still noted the intransigence of some Russian loyalists, as well as supporters of independence.[860] Moreover, even Beseler saw this change of sentiment only long after Berlin and Warsaw had already decided upon a multinationalist course.

Occupation authorities in Warsaw and policy-makers in Berlin bet on the German Empire's ability to direct Polish national sentiment by manipulating and winning the support of relatively small groups of Polish elites. Policy-makers in the German Empire espoused a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism, which emphasized the influence and agency of nationalist agitators and entrepreneurs. The centrality of elites and their ability to powerfully impact broader political discussions underpinned most multinationalist proposals. The Deputy General Staff's proposal for a German-Polish union, for instance, conveyed its author's foundational belief that Polish elites could be enticed into backing a multinational empire based on a Christian and conservative vision of occidental solidarity and that they could mobilize the broader Polish population to support this. The assumption that elites could be used to shape the political attitudes of the Polish demos ran through Foreign Office discussions.[861] It was also central to the Governor General's and Chancellor's explanation of the proposed German-Polish union to the Prussian *Staatsministerium* and Reichstag leadership.[862] It should therefore come as

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[852] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "'Konzept' on Polish Question Sent to Chancellor," August 2, 1916, 83, N30/12, BArch.
[853] von Pokrziwnitzki, "Warsaw Police Station Report for July 1916," 134.
[854] Klub der Anhänger des polnischen Staatswesens, "Brief an den deutschen Reichstag," September 1916, 159, N30/20, BArch.
[855] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Cover Letter for Reports on Assembly of the 'Klub Des Anhänger Für Ein Polnisches Staatswesen', Sent to v. Kries," September 4, 1916, 3, R1501/119718, BArch.
[856] Studnicki, "Open Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler," 120; GGW, "Zur Entwicklung in Polen," September 1916, 161, N30/20, BArch.
[857] GGW Kriminalkommissare, "Compiled Kriminalkomissare Reports on Assemblies of the 'Klubs Des Anhänger Für Ein Polnisches Staatswesen', October-September 1916.," November 1916, 15–50, R1501/119718, BArch.
[858] GGW, "Zur Entwicklung in Polen," 162.
[859] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "5th Report on the Administration of the Government General of Warsaw," October 23, 1916, 42, R1501/119760, BArch.
[860] Ibid.
[861] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Erich von Falkenhayn, 16 September 1915," 258; Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 4 October 1916," October 4, 1916, 65, N30/10, BArch.
[862] "Minutes of Meeting in the Prussian Staatsministerium," 141–42. Schorlemer-Lieser was, himself, Roman Catholic.

no surprise that so many of the GGW's occupation policies were designed to either sponsor and train new Polish elites, or to bring them into lockstep with the German government.

Most German leaders understood that the success of a German-Polish union would require Prussia to renounce or significantly relax anti-Polish policies. Ending Germanization in Prussia would be indispensible to building Poles' trust that the German Empire would respect their autonomy. To be sure, many in the government imagined that a new Polish state might inspire some form of voluntary exodus of Polish residents from Prussia.[863] But proponents didn't depend upon this hope. Like multinationalist publicists, official proposals for a Kingdom of Poland always assumed the toleration of an enduring Polish minority in Prussia.

The adoption of a multinational imperial strategy for Congress Poland was, in broad strokes, consistent with the German Empire's other imperial moves on the eastern front. The vast differences in occupation aims and strategy between the GGW and Ober Ost is generally explained in terms of the military's relative degree of control over each occupation. The civilian core of the GGW is portrayed as reining in the occupation's ambitions and habits, in contrast to the "military utopia" of Ober Ost.[864] This explanation sits comfortably with a historiography that has long emphasized the exaggerated and deleterious influence of military officials on wartime policy. The effects of military excess are visible in contrasts between the severity of police tactics and the extent of economic exploitation in the GGW and Ober Ost. However, the differences in *objectives* espoused in each region mapped onto distinctions in how policy-makers assessed local ethno-political conditions, and what strategies of ethnic management they considered appropriate. In contrast to Congress Poland, German policy-makers believed that societies along Russia's Baltic coast mainly lacked highly developed national cultures with loyal constituencies or vernacular elites capable of mobilizing sustained and effective resistance to German rule. Like Rohrbach and Schiemann, German policy-makers distinguished between *Kulturfähig* and *Staatsfähig* nations like Poland, which required compromise to rule, and less firmly institutionalized cultures like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, who did not.

German civilian and military leaders began the war remarkably unified in support of annexing and gradually Germanizing territory in the Baltics. The distinction between Polish nationhood and the relative underdevelopment of Baltic cultures was well established, and German policy-makers did not 'discover' Baltic primitivity during Russia's Great Retreat.[865] In September 1914, for instance, Erzberger made precisely this distinction between the political conditions in the Baltics and Poland, and therefore advocated two different strategies of ethnic management.[866] The multinationalist approach necessary to secure Congress Poland, he believed would be superfluous in the Baltics, which could be Germanized and supply new "areas for peasant settlement".[867] Keyserlingk, similarly felt that Polish intransigence would make annexations in Congress Poland more trouble than they were worth, but felt no compunction about annexing and Germanizing Suwałki, Kowno, and Vilnius.[868] The Lithuanians, he claimed, were not an "independent state-building element". He clarified that their nationalist movement was small and lacking in any real influence among the larger population.[869] Indeed, Keyserlingk argued that the Germany should annex as much of the Baltics as possible and partition Lithuanian territory with the other *Staatsfähig* nation in the neighborhood; Poland.[870] Writing in 1914, these observers didn't come to think of the Baltic peoples as 'primitive' as a result of the disastrous material conditions left by Russia's great retreat. Rather, cultural 'primitivity' served as shorthand for the perceived absence of a large and politically sophisticated vernacular elite capable of mobilizing national resistance to Germanization.

This distinction prevailed among German policy-makers, who almost uniformly

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[863] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 69.
[864] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 7.
[865] Ibid., 17, 26.
[866] Erzberger, "Memorandum on War Aims, 5 September 1914," 30.
[867] Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy*, 109.
[868] von Keyserlingk, "Das Schicksal der russischen Ostseeprovinzen," 174.
[869] Ibid.
[870] Ibid.

supported plans to annex and Germanize territory in the Baltics. Ober Ost, under Hindenburg and Ludendorff's direction, infamously attempted to establish a quasi-colonial regime in the region, with the aim of aggressively colonizing and Germanizing the region.[871] The military justified its rule by claiming that the German occupation was introducing order and civilization to the Baltics.[872] Ober Ost deliberately excluded natives from the occupation administration, arguing that natives were incapacitated by their "great cultural backwardness".[873] Instead Ober Ost directed its occupation policies towards developing and directing native cultures towards eventual Germanization.[874] Schooling, removed from native control, was designed to ingrain respect for German authority, and gradually introduce German as a second language.[875] Institutions of higher learning would instruct only in German. There would be no native intelligentsia.[876]

Far from being the product of military radicalism, this was essentially the program of war aims favored by civilian intellectuals, indeed left liberals, like Paul Rohrbach. Civilian leaders agreed at least with the broad outlines of this policy in the first years of the war. Few contested the idea that at least some of the Baltic littoral would be annexed to the German Empire. In October 1915, Jagow formally proposed annexing Lithuania.[877]

Reference to proposals for the annexation and Germanization of a "border-strip" of territory in Congress Poland has become historiographical shorthand for imperial policy-makers' supposed preference for potentially violent nationalizing methods of ethnic management.[878] Certainly German policy-makers did contemplate the annexation of varying amounts of Congress Poland throughout the war. However, from 1914 through November 1916, Military and Civilian leaders understood annexationism and multinational imperialism as alternative, rather than complimentary, war aims programs for Congress Poland. They also considered nationalizing models of ethnic management as an incompatible alternative to multinational collaboration. The civilian government and military leadership debated and assessed these competing imperial paradigms during the first two years of the war, and the model of a multinational German-Polish union gradually eclipsed its nationalizing competitors.

Historian's views of the "border-strip" are still largely based upon Geiss's original contention that Berlin prioritized annexations and Germanization throughout the war.[879] His main concrete evidence is that, from the winter of 1914 through the summer of 1915, key members of the Chancellery commissioned studies on the plausibility of annexations and Germanization, and occasionally queried Vienna's opinion on the matter.[880] The Chancellery's initial interest in a nationalized "border-strip" is hardly evidence of commitment. The various agencies of the German imperial government commissioned and produced a range of studies on both nationalizing and multinationalist paradigms. Even when the Chancellery commissioned pre-war supporters of internal colonization to study the feasibility of a border-strip, they received deeply mixed results. Yes Friedrich von Schwerin repeatedly returned positive endorsements of the plan. Yet his partner, and highly respected academic, Max Sering, just as vehemently warned Berlin to avoid the project. The latter's opposition goes virtually unmentioned in Geiss's work.

Interest in border-annexations as the core of imperial policy flourished under specific conditions, when a decisive victory against the Russian Empire appeared remote and Berlin

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[871] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 8, 89, 95; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 205; von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg," 75.
[872] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 45–46.
[873] Ibid., 7, 58.
[874] Ibid., 8.
[875] Ibid., 113, 125.
[876] Ibid., 126–27, 178–79.
[877] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 274.
[878] See Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*; Hull, *Absolute Destruction*; Jones, "The German Empire"; David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).
[879] Most historians who refer to the "border-strip" plan cite Geiss directly. Jesse Kauffman has broadly contested the centrality of the "border-strip" plan in wartime policy. Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order." However, he does not directly contest Geiss's actual findings.
[880] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 74–77. Geiss provides considerably more speculative evidence.

desired a separate peace with Petrograd. Border-adjustments seemed like the only prize within Berlin's grasp. As Berlin could not hope to establish a Polish state from a basket of disjointed territories along the German frontier, debate over ethnic management revolved around whether or how the new territories would be Germanized. When a separate peace was not forthcoming, however, civilian and military leaders generally decided that multinational imperialism offered better strategic prospects for the region, with less risk. Many did so with astounding rapidity, stating their support for something like a German-Polish union in the autumn of 1915.

Analysis of German war aims must carefully disentangle territorial interests from proposed methods of ethnic management. The term "border-strip" unfortunately, has systematically conflated these concepts. This confusion has hidden the reality that, even before policy-makers in Berlin abandoned plans for annexations along the German-Polish border, many had already begun to oppose nationalizing models of ethnic management. Geiss based his claim that Schwerin's endorsement of colonization and ethnic cleansing became "quasi-programmatic" largely on the fact that Bethmann Hollweg and Wahnschaffe discussed his memoranda, and that they continued to communicate with Schwerin after receiving them.[881] If the Chancellery actually committed to Schwerin's proposals in July 1915, their decision proved remarkably short-lived and contested. The model of ethnic management was vehemently opposed by the civilian chief of occupied-Poland who believed that Germans and Poles could coexist harmoniously in the German Empire. Bethmann Hollweg's instructions on the establishment of an occupation government in August clearly demonstrate that he had rejected the large scale Germanization and ethnic cleansing of annexed Polish territory as counterproductive.[882] Indeed by autumn many policy-makers no longer regarded nationalizing imperialism as a serious alternative and some even began to support multinationalist aims under the assumption that Germanization was a dead letter. Clemens von Delbrück endorsed a German-Polish union in September 1915 in part because he assumed that annexations would naturalize too many disgruntled Polish speakers as citizens of the German Empire.[883]

As military and civilian leaders decided to establish an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, they generally chose to abandon most claims to territory along the German-Polish frontier. As Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler coordinated their visions of a German-Polish union, they gradually shed all but their northern territorial claims.[884] Kries also significantly scaled back his suggestions for border-adjustments, proposing the annexation of Suwałki and parts of Łomża, but no territory in the southwest of Congress Poland. The northeastern reaches, he hoped, were "thinly populated, and economically insignificant" enough that Poles would willingly hand them to Berlin.[885] On 8 October, Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler presented a final list of proposed annexations to the Prussian *Staatsministerium*, suggesting adjustments to the northern border, at most up to the Bobr-Narew-Vistula line.[886] They suggested no adjustments to the Western frontier. The Chancellor and Governor General actually had compelling reasons to exaggerate Germany's territorial ambitions at this meeting. They faced a skeptical audience, which had instigated the conference by promulgating a petition hostile to multinational imperialism. Overstating Germany's territorial claims might have easily soothed the minds of skeptical Prussian ministers.

Of course, some within the German military raised objections and pressed Berlin to reconsider the western-border question. However, by the end of the summer of 1916 Beseler confident enough in the support of Hindenburg and Ludendorff that he trusted the rising military leaders to use their reputation to secure support for the German-Polish union in Vienna and Berlin.[887] In a 23 August note to Bethmann Hollweg, Hindenburg stated his position that the size of border-corrections should correspond to the nature and reliability of Poland's attachment to

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[881] Ibid., 78–86.
[882] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Erich von Falkenhayn Regarding Plans for Poland," 13–14.
[883] von Delbrück, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 21 September 1915," 24.
[884] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Field Marshall Hindenburg at Ober Ost," 22.
[885] von Kries, "Aufzeichnung über ihm vorschwebende Zukunftsmöglichkeiten für Polen," 18.AA
[886] "Minutes of Meeting in the Prussian Staatsministerium," 133.
[887] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Paul von Hindenburg," October 3, 1916, 60, N30/10, BArch.

the German Empire. He agreed that Berlin should limit its appetite to only what was absolutely necessary for military considerations, and avoid any designs that could be viewed as a "fourth partition" of Poland.[888] Hindenburg did not object to the borders staked out by Beseler in his 8 October presentations, either during the meeting or in subsequent communications.[889]

By the end of the summer of 1916 both Berlin the GGW actually aimed to create a militarily and economically robust Kingdom of Poland, expanded as far eastward as negotiations with Russia would allow. Beseler stalwartly championed the idea of expanding the Kingdom of Poland into White Ruthenia, potentially the governorates of Grodno, Minsk, Volhynia, and perhaps parts of Wilna. Kries also favored the transfer of Bialystock and Cholm to the Kingdom of Poland.[890] Bethmann Hollweg was initially skeptical. He doubted that negotiations with Petrograd could secure territory east of the Bug. But he still suggested stoking Polish nationalist ambitions for White Ruthenia, in the hopes that resulting irredentism would further poison Polish opinion against the Russian Empire after the war.[891] By October Beseler had convinced the Chancellor of both the wisdom and plausibility of an expanded Poland. As presented to the Reichstag leaders and Prussian ministers, therefore, the autonomous Kingdom of Poland was to encompass almost all of Congress Poland and parts of White Ruthenia and Lithuania.[892]

The question of Poland's eastern frontier became one of the primary issues of internal dispute among Germany policy-makers in 1916. Though the GGW and civilian agencies favored a large Polish state, Hindenburg and Ludendorff remained skeptical. Both worried that a Polish state would claim territories they hoped would be annexed to Prussia. Specifically, the pair argued that the security of East Prussia required substantial annexations in Grodno and Kowno.[893] Whether or not Hindenburg and Ludendorff intended it, this would have more or less surrounded the Kingdom of Poland with German territory on three sides and isolated it from Russia.

The GGW, the civilian government, and even other organs of the German military strongly opposed annexing territory to the east of a Polish state. Bethmann Hollweg took up the gauntlet and repeatedly attempted to rein in the architects of Ober Ost. In January and again in March 1916, the Chancellor clarified to both Ludendorff and Beseler that Polish publications claiming eastern territory for a revived Polish state were to be neither punished nor censored. He emphasized that Polish territorial claims would at a minimum reorient nationalist aspirations eastward, against Russia, and might even result in a stronger Polish state under German suzerainty. He therefore opposed Ober Ost's efforts to annex White Ruthenian territory.[894]

Though Bethmann Hollweg and Beseler presented the expansion of a Kingdom of Poland eastward to be Berlin's official policy, Hindenburg and Ludendorff continued to oppose the notion. On 13 October, Hindenburg telegrammed the Chancellor in an effort to prevent the finalization of Poland's eastern frontier, which he feared would ratify the enlargement of Poland. He asked to keep the matter open, arguing that the eastward expansion of Poland should not be prioritized at the moment.[895] Weeks later, Ludendorff formally requested that the Foreign Office avoid promises of eastern territories as it drafted the announcement of Polish statehood.[896] Ultimately, the Chancellery was unable to resolve this policy-disagreement with the new leadership of the OHL prior to the announcement of Polish statehood. The German Empire therefore opted to leave the issue open.

It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that the OHL had effectively killed Poland's eastward expansion at this point. The Chancellery, Foreign Office, and GGW, all supported the

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[888] von Hindenburg, "Hindenburg an Reichskanzler," 29.
[889] von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg," 75.
[890] von Kries, "Aufzeichnung über ihm vorschwebende Zukunftsmöglichkeiten für Polen," 19.
[891] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Field Marshall Hindenburg at Ober Ost," 25.
[892] "Minutes of Meeting in the Prussian Staatsministerium," 131.
[893] von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg," 75.
[894] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Reichskanzler an Beseler in 'Polen: Zusammenstellung aus der Akten der Reichskanzlei.,'" March 29, 1916, 21–22, NL Jagow 3, PA AA; Arnold Wahnschaffe, "Memo to Undersecretary Arthur Zimmermann," May 25, 1916, 106, R21577, PA AA.
[895] von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg," 75.
[896] Kurt von Lersner, "Report to the Foreign Office from Pleß," October 30, 1916, 192, R21661, PA AA.

creation of a militarily powerful and territorially aggrandized Polish state under German Suzerainty. They had presented this as official policy to the Kaiser, the Prussian Government, and the leadership of the Reichstag, and had established this design as the basis of German intentions in their negotiations with Vienna. Hindenburg and Ludendorff constituted the only noteworthy opposition to the project. Germany's leadership believed that it was in the process of building a large autonomous Polish state in permanent union with the German Empire.

The German and Austro-Hungarian Kaisers jointly announced the establishment of the Kingdom of Poland on 5 November 1916. Hutten-Czapski publicly read the proclamation, which came to be known as the "Two-Kaiser Manifesto", at Warsaw Castle.[897] Beseler spoke on the occasion, but only briefly. His speech, less than a page, called on Poles to build their new state and join the fight against Russian autocracy.[898] The announcement met with cheers and ignited celebrations across the city.[899] The manifesto left the identity of Poland's king unresolved. It enumerated neither Poland's borders, nor its precise relationship with the sponsoring empires.[900] All these issues remained deliberately vague in public, though Berlin had clear plans for each.

Reaction in the GGW was generally positive. Sympathetic elements in the GGW vocally thanked the Kaiser. One note of thanks to Beseler expressed the writers' desire for Poland to become a "member of *Mitteleuropa*", and work closely with their "liberators".[901] The staff of the GGW also took considerable pride in the establishment of the state. Gerd von Rundstedt, a young and trusted officer on Beseler's staff at the time, sent a letter to the Governor General, congratulating him on the "at last achieved success".[902]

Multinationalist intellectuals also greeted the announcement with jubilation. Rohrbach praised the creation of the Polish state as the keystone for Germany's security in the East.[903] Friedrich Naumann described it as the culmination of *Mitteleuropäisch* cooperation. Surely, he argued, the collaboration of the German and Austro-Hungarian Kaisers on a matter of such import presupposed the "lasting coherence" and unification of the two empires as a "fixed fact".[904] He read the Kaisers' "common agreement" to organize a Polish Army as implying the immanent conclusion of a "military convention" and other constitutional structures, "through which the future relations of the federalized armies" of Central Europe would be regulated.[905] Together Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Poland would defend the "straightest and most militarily advantageous border between *Mitteleuropa* and Russia possible".[906]

In the days following 5 November, Multinationalist writers argued that Polish nationals would indeed greet the declaration with an enthusiastic readiness to fight alongside the Central Powers in defense of their new Kingdom. Theodor Schiemann praised the creation of the Kingdom of Poland, and its expected national army.[907] Congress Poles, he believed, "know, what they have to expect from Russia, and also know to treasure the guarantees, which they have received for the maintenance of their national independence".[908] Other multinationalists believed Polish enthusiasm was already evident. Julius Bachem reported that reaction to the news of the Manifest in Polish circles was, so far as he could tell, "almost unanimously positive", with perhaps some grumbling among nationalists in Posen.[909]

Public reaction in Germany varied, but many celebrated the establishment of a Polish

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[897] Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, "Letter to Kaiser Wilhelm II," November 5, 1916, 67, N30/21, BArch.
[898] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Speech at Warsaw Castle," November 5, 1916, 58, N30/21, BArch.
[899] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 55.
[900] "Proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland, Published Flyer" (Government General of Warsaw, November 5, 1916), 55, N30/21, BArch; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 78.
[901] Lempicki, "Letter of Thanks by the 'Leage of Polish Statehood,'" November 5, 1916, 59, N30/21, BArch.
[902] Gerd von Rundstedt, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler," November 5, 1916, 69, N30/21, BArch.
[903] Paul Rohrbach, "Polen," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 17, 1916): 2011–17.
[904] Friedrich Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1917), 47–50.
[905] Ibid., 50.
[906] Ibid., 54.
[907] Theodor Schiemann, "Streiflichter zur Weltlage XX," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 24, 1916): 2070–72.
[908] Ibid., 2072.
[909] Julius Bachem, "Das neue Polen," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben* 5, no. 42 (November 20, 1916): 175.

state, hoping that military union with the German Empire would finally render Germany's eastern border defensible, even as it fulfilled the wishes of Polish nationalists.[910] One article in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* endorsed the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland, bound to the Central Powers, for reinforcing Germany's vulnerable eastern border and fulfilling the aspirations of the Polish nation.

> A shorter, strongly defended border will be the firm foundation of a harmonious relationship with our Russian neighbor… We offer to Poland, liberated from Russian rule, the opportunity to govern its political, economic, and cultural life as its own state, dependent upon and in fixed federation with the Central Powers. Namely, they will thereby claim our assistance for the coming era.[911]

Russian rule, the author continued, had repressed "Polish administration, Polish education, [and] Polish military strength".[912] Military and Political union with Germany, the editorial concluded, would allow the Polish nation to develop free from Russian control. In late 1916, this flagship paper of German conservatism considered multinational imperialism the optimal means for securing Berlin's objectives in Poland.

From 1914 to 1916, German intellectuals, publicists, civilian leaders, and military commanders all debated the merits of two paradigms of imperial organization and ethnic management for Poland. By 5 November 1916, each of these groups clearly favored multinational imperialism over nationalizing imperialism. For the moment, Germany's imperial leadership optimistically looked forward to building a permanent federal multinational empire, with Poland as a powerful and reliable component.

Frustration with the failure of Germanization policies did not produce overwhelming pressure for more aggressive forms of nationalization, either within the Prussian bureaucracy, or within the German government more broadly. Rather, experience apparently taught Prussian and German officials that Polish national identity was a firmly established and potentially powerful political force, which could not be easily suppressed or Germanized through education. Though a few took this to mean that aggressive colonization or ethnic cleansing would be needed to secure Polish territory, more opted for multinational imperialism. Though Germans almost unanimously considered Polish national identity practically immutable, many believed that the political content of Polish nationalist discourse was fungible. National identity, in other words, was not seen as strictly determining political loyalty. So long as civilian and military elites believed that they could negotiate with Polish national elites, and manipulate Polish sentiment more broadly, they proved remarkably optimistic about the potential reliability of a Polish satellite state.

The German Empire, in effect, attempted to manage the claims of modern nationalist politics, accommodating nationalists within the context of an imperial structure. Thoughtful proponents of multinationalism often believed Europe was on the cusp of a great transformation. In November 1915, Jastrow wrote that the world was witnessing the end of "imperium", by which he meant that states would no longer be able to ignore nationalist claims.[913] As an alternative to nationalist parcellation and homogenization, Berlin attempted to build a reformed multinational imperialism, based upon federal autonomy. Though immediately interested in the future of Congress Poland, many German intellectuals and imperial leaders explicitly saw this as a general organizational model, for possible application elsewhere in the future.

German observers understood the proclamation of 5 November as an experiment. Multinationalists felt confident that Germany could convince Congress Poles to collaborate with, and eventually reliably defend, a German-Polish union. They now waited to see if this assumption would be born out, or if Polish nationalism would prove inherently and inevitably hostile to the interests of the German Empire. Success, proponents argued, would bring regional

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[910] "Polens Schicksalstunde" (Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, November 5, 1916), 64, R1501/119671, BArch.
[911] Quoted in Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 48.
[912] Quoted in Ibid.
[913] Jastrow, "Momentbild aus Wien," 122.

stability, security, and vastly improve German military resources. Failure, opponents warned, risked furnishing a hostile nation with its own state and national army, and further exposing Prussia to nationalist subversion and irredentism.[914] Broadly, German observers waited to see if multinationalism could still offer a viable model of imperial organization.

The decision to actively recruit a Polish national army during the present war, established a highly visible measure for Polish sympathy for the Central Powers. Already in November, the Polish army took on an overwrought symbolic importance. Writing shortly after the 5 November, Naumann warned Poles that the "Polish state cannot be a mere gift", and tasked them with quickly recruiting a national army.[915] Theodor Schiemann aped this sentiment, stating that the Kingdom of Poland had a duty to fight alongside its allies against the common enemy of Russia.[916] "The tempo and scale of enlistment" Schiemann wrote, "will be a measure of the sincerity of Polish attachment to the Central Powers for both friendly and enemy observers".[917] On 5 November 1915, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote with cautious optimism about the prospect for Polish collaboration.[918] The reporter, however, insisted that the 5 November proclamation represented an opportunity for Poles to convince the German Empire that it could trust and rely upon the faithful collaboration of the Polish nation.[919]

[914] Friedrich Naumann, "Wir und die Polen," *Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben*, January 1, 1916, 890; Cleinow, "Voraussetzungen für die Lösung des polnischen Problems," 98; Friedrich Karl Gramsch, "Letter, Copied to Reichsamt Des Innern, Summer 1916," Summer 1916, 274, R1501/119780, BArch; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 143.
[915] Friedrich Naumann, "Der polnische Staat," *Die Hilfe*, November 9, 1916, 894.
[916] Theodor Schiemann, "Streiflichter zur Weltlage XXI," *Deutsche Politik* 1 (November 23, 1916): 2137. See also W. Bacmeister, "Probleme des Ostens," *Das größere Deutschland* 3 (November 18, 1916): 1477.
[917] Schiemann, "Streiflichter zur Weltlage XXI," 2138.
[918] "Polens Schicksalstunde," 64.
[919] Ibid.

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The Crisis of Multinational Imperialism

By November 1916, German policy-makers in the OHL, GGW, and *Reichsleitung* all felt confident that they could establish an autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire. They believed that Warsaw's own strategic interests would motivate it to defend the German-Polish union and they further concluded that this quasi-federal arrangement would best achieve Germany's own imperial objectives in Eastern Europe. A significant and influential quarter of German public discourse shared this optimism. By the end of the war, however, this confidence had disappeared.

From November 1916 through November 1918, the experience of occupying Poland significantly eroded German faith in the plausibility and stability of multinational imperialism. Polish collaboration with the occupation's state building efforts project proved neither as enthusiastic nor as consistent as German imperialists had expected. Instead, visible assertions of Polish political will shook Germans' belief that Poles would eventually accept German suzerainty as legitimate. Polish social and political leaders, often dissatisfied with the pace of state building and frustrated by wartime material privation, regularly challenged Germany's authority, organizing resistance or orchestrating dramatic acts of protest against the occupation. Some of these challenges articulated a vision of Polish independence which explicitly rejected German suzerainty. Over the final two years of the war, the combination of unsatisfactory cooperation and vocal nationalist opposition in occupied-Poland fueled German concerns that the leadership and people of the Polish nation were unshakably committed to the realization of a sovereign Polish state, perhaps even a Greater-Poland which included Prussian territory. The net effect was that Germans increasingly suspected that an autonomous Kingdom of Poland would not, in fact, reliably fight alongside the German Empire as Bavaria had fought alongside Prussia.

In particular, German observers believed that events in Poland had discredited the strategies by which they had hoped to foster popular legitimacy for a German-Polish union. They began to distrust occupation's capacity to reliably control Polish political, social, and intellectual elites, and to use these national leaders to cultivate sympathy for a German-Polish union among the broader population. Polish leaders proved far less pliable to Germany's agenda than anticipated. They pushed back against German demands, negotiated with Berlin, and insisted on more progress in state building efforts before they joined the war against Russia. Such assertions often struck German imperialists as insolent or ungrateful, and many began to doubt that Poland's leadership would faithfully work to stabilize a German-Polish union in the future.

Even if they considered it possible to find a cadre of sympathetic Polish elites, experiences in Poland increasingly led German imperialists to doubt that Polish leaders could actually manipulate the political sentiments of the masses. Many of the myriad political disruptions in occupied Poland after 1916 seemed to occur without the sanction, or even against wishes, of the same political elites which the GGW was relying to reinforce the legitimacy of German rule. Sympathetic Polish elites appeared incapable of influencing the broader population. Germans began to worry that political movements would only resonate among the Polish population if they spoke to the masses' own, anti-German, political convictions.

German imperialists therefore began to lose faith that an autonomous Polish state would loyally serve the interests of a German-Polish union. They instead felt the mounting dread that a Polish state would function, as nationalizing imperialists had warned, as the Serbia of the north, always working to subvert Prussian sovereignty and waiting for the opportune moment to turn its own military against the German Empire. The German government and public increasingly worried that Poles would either resist German suzerainty, fail to defend the German-Polish union when required, or outright betray the German Empire. They began to perceive Polish statehood more as a liability than a potential strategic asset.

The deterioration of multinational imperialism's credibility is evident in both public debates and official policy-making. Political crises and frictions in occupied-Poland spurred the publicists and intellectuals, who had previously spilled wells of ink advocating multinationalism, to waver in their support for the project. Prominent voices continued to defend the paradigm until

the end of the war, but they were now on the defensive against mounting criticism. Many proposed addenda or qualifications to the German-Polish union, either to directly ensure German security, or to compel Polish obedience to Berlin. Some former proponents of multinational imperialism concluded that Poland could not be trusted, and withdrew their support for a German-Polish union. Of these, a few began to vocally criticize multinationalism for exposing Germany to Polish treachery. They now called for aggressive Germanization of annexed Polish territories as the only means to effectively secure Germany's eastern frontier. Long-time supporters of nationalizing imperialism felt that these same experiences had vindicated their earlier warnings. Experiences in Poland equipped them with new evidence to demonstrate the incompatibility of Polish national interests and German imperial security.

Among the leadership of the German Empire in the *Reichsleitung*, GGW, and OHL, political frictions in occupied Poland reignited debate over whether Germany could trust an autonomous Polish state to defend its interests. At the nadir of German trust in Polish fidelity, Berlin briefly decided to abandon its efforts to build a German-Polish union. While official support for multinational imperialism recovered, German policy-makers continued to regard Poland with distrust. The final year of the war therefore saw German leaders' increased interest in policies to deter Polish disloyalty, or to more effectively protect the German Empire in case of Polish betrayal. Officials became more comfortable with demanding larger annexations along the Polish border to steel vital German regions from Polish attack. They once again contemplated nationalizing policies to manage these annexations, aiming to exclude Poles from influence over the local government. Berlin retreated from its previous interest in augmenting the Kingdom of Poland's military and economic resources through expansion into White Ruthenia. The German Imperial government instead increasingly bowed to the OHL's interest in encircling Poland with a string of annexations or German-dependencies along Poland's eastern border. Indeed, concerned that Poland might challenge German hegemony in Eastern Europe, leaders in Berlin contemplated new policies to insulate the Baltics from the influence of Warsaw or Polish nationalist organizations. Finally, German policy-makers considered new ways to more effectively dragoon Warsaw's faithful service to a German-Polish union, whether through permanent occupation, economic threats, or even blackmail.

When historians have noted a shift in German attitudes towards imperial management after 1916, they have usually emphasized the impact of the Reichstag Peace Resolution of July 1917, and the mounting pressure of international opinion. Fischer thus argued that Germany's imperial leadership reluctantly began to plan for the creation of autonomous states in Eastern Europe largely because the Russian Revolution and America's entry into the war had opened space for Eastern European peoples to imagine their own self-governance in the future.[1] Close examination of German imperial policy in Poland and the Baltics, however, suggests a different interpretation. As previous chapters have demonstrated, Germany's preferred imperial strategy for handling politically mobilized 'nations' was to trade robust political autonomy for loyalty to a federally construed multinational union. They began to lose confidence in, and indeed functionally abandon, this strategy in 1917. The Reichstag's public prohibition of annexations forced Berlin to reframe its imperial ambitions in the Baltics, but it had left the option of multinational imperialism on the table. However, disappointments in Poland in 1917 effectively dissuaded Germany's leadership from offering a similar multinationalist bargain to the Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian nations.

Historians have also tended to portray German imperial policy in Poland as relatively static, and argued that Germany consistently prioritized its ambitions for a large and Germanized-border strip, over any hypothetical plans for a Polish protectorate.[2] Geiss's assessment, that Berlin never actually trusted Poland, and that it never considered a Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty to be the centerpiece of Germany's war aims in the Poland, still

[1] Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 271.
[2] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914-1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historische Studien 378 (Hamburg: Matthiesen Verlag, 1960), 117.

generally shapes historians' perspectives today.[3] Because he believed that Germans never really took Polish state-building seriously, Geiss did not investigate how experiences in occupying Congress-Poland influenced German assumptions about empire-building and ethnic management. There is remarkably little discussion of policies of ethnic management in his work, and almost no mention of major crises which occurred in the GGW after 1916. In contrast I argue that wartime events in occupied Poland decisively transformed how Germans understood the relationship between ethnic identity and political loyalty. These experiences cast doubt on the stability of multinational empire, and reinforced voices who claimed that only ethnic homogeneity could achieve lasting imperial security.

Others have blamed shifts in German policy toward Poland on the military's exaggerated role in imperial leadership. Any discussion of German war aims in 1916-1918 must account for the role of the third OHL, the oft-described military dictatorship of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. When scholars have noted a change in Germany's policy towards Poland, they have often blamed this on the growing influence of Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and their preference for large annexations and aggressive nationalization along the German-Polish border.[4] Historians frequently claim that Hindenburg and Ludendorff dictated Polish policy to reluctant civilian leaders through frequent threats of resignation. Broszat judged that the OHL's disproportionate weight enabled them to overrule competing proposals for reorganizing Poland, offered by figures like Beseler, Naumann, and Erzberger.[5] The result, he argues, was that the military's obsession with annexations effectively silenced proponents of multinational imperialism in the German government. In this interpretation, changing attitudes towards multinationalist ethnic management played little role in shaping Polish policy in the later years of the war.

This chapter argues otherwise. First, the army did not dictate, nor did it even lead, German decision-making with regard to Poland. In 1917 and 1918, civilians frequently were the first to endorse new strategies in Poland, which the OHL initially disliked, but later accepted. Moreover, the agencies and leaders of the *Reichsleitung* could and did resist the army's demands, when they felt that the OHL's ambitions in Poland were politically, diplomatically, or strategically counterproductive. Second, the OHL's emphasis on annexations and Germanization as the centerpiece of policy was itself the product of their growing pessimism over the potential reliability of a German-Polish union. The militarist interpretation of Polish policy has long rested on the erroneous assumption that figures like Ludendorff had opposed the creation of a German-Polish union, or supported it only to lure Polish soldiers into the trenches. In fact, Ludendorff had supported Beseler's vision a German-Polish union as a long-term objective for Germany, and he continued to do so well into 1917. The OHL's renewed support for annexations and Germanization are themselves traceable to their own disillusionment with multinational imperialism in light of events in occupied-Poland. Finally, civilian officials and military commanders grew more suspicious of Poland, simultaneously. If civilian leaders were more likely to resist the extravagant plans of the OHL, they still fundamentally agreed with Hindenburg and Ludendorff's desire for greater security and guarantees of control vis-à-vis Poland. While military and civilian leaders disagreed over methods, virtually all agencies agreed that Germany required greater security guarantees against Poland, including larger annexations on the border, as well as new measures to contain and control the Kingdom of Poland.

The Failure of Recruitment for the Polish Army, November-December 1916

In early November 1916, an atmosphere of cautious optimism reigned in Berlin. Prussian press reports suggested that Polish papers indeed acknowledged Polish statehood as a significant

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[3] Ibid., 28; Heather Jones, "The German Empire," in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed. Robert Gerwath and Erez Manela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).Geiss 28. Notable exceptions include: Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Stephan Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation: Occupied East Central Europe during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014).

[4] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 116, 136–37.

[5] Martin Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich: Ehrenwirth, 1963), 149–51.

achievement, even if they remained skeptical.[6] One Pole correctly perceived Berlin's self-interested intentions in the declaration, but nonetheless hoped that "Poles accept the gift" and join the war with Russia.[7]

The first blow to Berlin's confidence in multinational imperialism came almost immediately, with the miscarriage of German efforts to recruit a Polish army. The rush to recruit a Polish army reflected the Central Powers' dire manpower situation in late 1916. GGW officials and multinationalists throughout the German government had warned that cultivating popular legitimacy for a German-Polish union would take at least several years. Polish collaborators had also warned that a Polish state would require concrete institutionalization, namely a Polish regent, a state council, and the reunification of the GGL and GGW into a single administrative zone, before a national army could be successfully recruited.[8] In the immediate wake of 5 November, these sympathetic Poles urged the GGW to establish at least a skeleton of Polish legitimacy prior to recruitment. On 7 November, Mutius sent a note to Beseler, reporting that, after discussions with Józef Brudziński, he "urgently" advised that "the measures planned to form a Council of State should precede call for the recruitment of volunteers".[9] The following day, Beseler received petitions from sympathetic Poles like Ronikier, Radziwiłł, Brudziński, and Lempicki, all urging him to form a Polish government before attempting to recruit a Polish army, lest Poles discount Berlin's promises of future autonomy as a cynical ploy for cannon-fodder.[10]

However, dwindling reserves in the German and Austro-Hungarian armies cut across these long-term considerations of imperial policy. The Hindenburg Program, the new OHL's policy of full industrial and military mobilization, had already foisted novel, and more severe, labor practices onto the GGW.[11] In October, unpopular work-shyness measures, similar to those already in effect in Germany, permitted the GGW to draft Poles receiving state benefits directly into labor-battalions.[12] Similarly, despite all concerns raised against rushing the creation of a Polish national army, Hindenburg had ultimately pushed Beseler to begin recruitment, without delay, on 9 November 1916.[13]

The call for voluntary enlistment into a Polish national army therefore followed almost immediately, preceding any real institutionalization of the Polish government, or even a public announcement of a concrete timeline for state-building. The GGW issued an announcement on 9 November, enjoining the Polish nation to join the war on the side of their "liberator" and describing the "formation of its own army" as the "first and most important step towards Polish stately autonomy".[14] Hoping to marshal native traditions, Beseler dispatched Polish Legion Officers to assist side local *Kreischefs* and Polish *Wójts* to petition for civilian volunteers.[15]

Initial recruitment failed miserably. Far from the expected harvest of multiple divisions, recruiters reaped only a few hundred volunteers.[16] Myriad reasons contributed to the dramatic shortfall of Polish recruits. Many Polish men had already been mobilized into the Russian army and, as German and Polish observers were well aware, men of military age remaining in Poland

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[6] Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* CXXVI, no. 522 (2011): 1152–53.
[7] Quoted in Ibid., 1153.
[8] Delegation of Polish Notables, "Petition to Chancellor on Plans for Building the Polish State," October 1916, 120, N30/13, BArch.
[9] Gerhard von Mutius, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 7 November 1916," November 7, 1916, 70, N30/21, BArch.
[10] Delegation of Polish Notables, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 8 November 1916," November 8, 1916, 71–72, N30/21, BArch; Lempicki, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 8 November 1916," November 8, 1916, 73, N30/21, BArch.
[11] Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation," 95–96.
[12] Ibid., 96; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 57.
[13] Paul von Hindenburg, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 6 November 1916," November 6, 1916, 108, N30/10, BArch.
[14] GGW, "„Der Ruf zu den Waffen"," November 9, 1916, 76, N30/21, BArch.
[15] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Bericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 20 Dezember 1916," Dezember 1916, 20, R1501/119710, BArch; Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Our Recruitment Measures and Their Results," February 1917, 50, N30/14, BArch.
[16] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 245.

were often reluctant to take up arms against their fathers, sons, brothers, nephews, cousins, friends, or neighbors already serving the Tsar. For Polish Russian subjects, restraint was a practical course of action, for if the Russians ultimately took back Congress Poland, service in the Polish army would constitute treason. The Central Powers also attempted recruitment on a voluntary basis, which had provided relatively few soldiers to most combatant states after the first weeks of the war of Great Britain. Many civilians had obeyed their conscription orders with resolve, but not glee, and by 1916 many were not especially enthused to join the horrific grind.

Conscious political opposition to either the specific policies of the occupying powers, or their future plans for Congress Poland, played at least some role in the reluctance of Polish civilians to enlist. For comparison, after German troops had first entered Warsaw in 1915, Polish Legionnaires had actually actively recruited locals for seven days in September before being halted by the OHL. In this brief period, German officials estimated that the Legion had managed to recruit "a few hundred" new men into the Polish-led paramilitary organization.[17] As predicted, the lack of concrete political institutions prior to recruitment reinforced Polish suspicions that Berlin never actually intended to follow-through on their pledge of statehood.[18] Nationalist activists scorned the proclamation of Polish statehood as an obvious confidence-trick to lure Polish men into the ranks of the German Army. On 10 November activists of the CKN, a coordinating body for left-wing activist parties led by the Polish Socialist Party, plastered posters across Warsaw opposing enlistment.[19] On 12 November, they organized popular demonstrations.[20] Incensed Poles chanted "We don't want to be German soldiers!".[21]

In the weeks following 9 November, optimism regarding a German-Polish union evaporated among German officials. German observers read the recruitment shortfall as a public demonstration that the population of Congress Poland was largely uninterested in collaborating with the German Empire against Russia. Inflated pre-November expectations in Berlin only sharpened this disappointment. Falkenhayn had predicted that Polish men would flood the recruiting offices. Collaborators like Studnicki had pledged even more absurd numbers. Beseler, despite his caution, also vastly overestimated Polish interest. When the desired cohorts failed to materialize, German observers regarded it as flippant ingratitude towards Berlin's generosity, and dismissed Polish complaints about the lack of political institutions as mere excuses.[22] That Poles were apparently willing to fight for the Polish Legion, but unwilling to fight for an army more closely linked to Berlin, seemed to confirm German fears that Poles would refuse Berlin's leadership. In December 1916, Matthias Erzberger noted that officials in Berlin had begun to refer to imperial policy in Poland as a "heap of shattered fragments".[23]

The sudden political upheaval throughout Poland shocked local authorities in the GGW. Throughout 1916, occupation officials had considered Congress Poland relatively stable, and seen little determined resistance to German rule. With the exception of chronic banditry, Warsaw had perceived no major challenge to their rule. In April 1916, Glasenapp had requested more local police personnel in the GGW, but not to augment the political police or gendarme. Rather, Glasenapp wanted to concentrate his scarce police resources on expanding local vice-squads [*Sittenpolizei*] to combat illegal prostitution and slow the spread of venereal disease, especially among German soldiers.[24]

Demonstrations and local resistance to military recruitment shocked German authorities and forced them to reconsider their belief in Poles' political docility and malleability. Warsaw

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[17] Major General von der Esch, "Report to War Ministry, 19 November 1916," November 19, 1916, 49, R1501/119831, BArch.
[18] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 82; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 145.
[19] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 82.
[20] Ibid., 83.
[21] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 146.
[22] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 13 April 1917," April 13, 1917, 138, N30/9, BArch.
[23] Quoted in Jesse Kauffman, "Sovereingty and the Search for Order in German-Occupied Poland, 1915-1918" (Stanford University, 2008), 57.
[24] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Report to Wolfgang von Kries, 15 April 1916," April 15, 1916, 202, R1501/119662, BArch.

simmered with sporadic unrest through January of 1917. In one incident, German army units were called in to disperse a large protest on the grounds of Warsaw University.[25] Locally, unrest associated with recruitment challenged occupation officials' faith in Germany's methods for securing influence over the Kingdom of Poland. On 21 November, the military government of Łomża reported to Warsaw on the slow pace of recruitment.[26] Apparently attributing the shortfall to their own methods, the military government sought permission to enlist the support of the local Roman Catholic clergy.[27] Operating under a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism, the military government's first instinct was to seek the support of Polish elites who would then whip mass support for the new Polish army. Events in Łomża, however, dramatically contradicted the military governments' expectations. In December 1916, the *Kreischef* of Łomża reported to Warsaw that local elites had not only failed to spur popular enthusiasm for the new Polish state, but the local peasantry now also fumed at Polish landowners and clergy, accusing them of betraying Poland to the Germans for their own material gain.[28] The situation deteriorated so far that property owners feared peasants would resort to arson in revenge.[29] The *Kreischef* concluded by stating his concern that local events reflected broader popular discontent in the GGW.[30] The GGW attended carefully to this report. Born-Fallois considered it sufficiently important to pass it on to the RAI, indicating that Warsaw too worried that Polish elites might not be as effective an avenue for German influence as previously assumed.

In Warsaw, Kries offered a measured response. He considered Polish reluctance to collaborate understandable given the lack of political institutionalization following the 5 November proclamation. The chief administrator recommended immediately dismantling the German-Austrian condominium in Russian Poland, so that the GGW could make rapid and unilateral decisions on state-building. An opening fusillade in efforts to construct a Polish government, Kries hoped, would restore Polish confidence in Germany's promises and, eventually, its leadership.[31] Kries also suggested that, now that Poland was technically an ally of the German Empire, the occupation should reduce the burden of wartime requisitions and substantially improve material conditions in the region.[32]

While Beseler remained committed to building an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, the failure of recruitment wounded Beseler, fundamentally shook his confidence in Germany's ability to cultivate Polish loyalty to a German-Polish union, and prompted him to contemplate more disciplinary policies of ethnic management that the German Empire might employ to achieve its objectives in Congress Poland. By 14 November Poles' unwillingness to enlist had begun to frustrate Beseler. In letters to Bethmann Hollweg and the commanders of Ober Ost, Beseler reported that Poles were showing no "particular enthusiasm" for the new Polish state.[33] He blamed both the continued intransigence of Russian loyalists, as well as what he considered unreasonable demands by Polish nationalists for the immediate turnover of governing authority to a Polish regent and a council of state.[34] He complained that Polish agitators painted the occupation government as "foreign, repressive, and illegitimate" and constantly discovered new excuses, new "if's and but's" to refrain from participating in the war effort.[35] In a letter to his

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[25] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 185.
[26] Military Government of Łomża, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 21 November 1916," November 21, 1916, 109, N30/21, BArch.
[27] Ibid., 111.
[28] Kreischef of Łomża, "Report to the Civil Administration of the GGW, December 1916," December 1916, 93, R1501/119718, BArch.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Wolfgang von Kries, "Note to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 19 November 1916," November 19, 1916, 107, N30/21, BArch.
[32] von Bilinski, "Tagung des Polenklubs in Krakau am 3. Und 4. Oktober 1916.," October 4, 1916, 8, N30/21, BArch.
[33] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 14 November 1916," November 14, 1916, 160, N30/13, BArch; Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Ober Ost Explaining the Political Situation in Poland, 24 November 1916," November 24, 1916, 124, N30/10, BArch.
[34] von Beseler, "Letter to Ober Ost Explaining the Political Situation in Poland, 24 November 1916," 125.
[35] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 14 November 1916," 160.

wife, Beseler dismissed Poles as "political children" who "imagine already that they liberated themselves, and actually demand, that they already now, in the middle of a war, must seize authority here for themselves".[36]

Under Beseler's leadership, the GGW rapidly adopted reforms to salvage the situation.* These, however, yielded little immediate progress and by December, however, the relations between the GGW and the occupation had reached a low point. Disillusionment in response to the failure of recruitment was palpable in Beseler's official reports to Berlin, which increasingly recommended more disciplinary policies to command Polish support. Beseler opened his 20 December 1916 report to the Kaiser by admitting that Polish reaction to the announcement of statehood had "failed" to meet the administration's "justified" expectations and "brought only great disappointment".[37] His minimal hope that Germany could expect a small core of volunteers for a future Polish national army had been mislaid.[38] Beseler conceded that he had been deceived by the exuberant 3 May celebrations in Warsaw, which had duped him into believing claims in Polish newspapers of a "hot desire of the Polish nation for battle with the Russians".[39] Having issued an appeal to Polish patriots to take up arms against their Russian oppressors, Beseler felt particularly worried that he had been rebuffed by both Polish national elites and the Polish public.[40] Disconcertingly, the specter of Russian imperial revival had not rallied Polish sentiment behind collaboration with the German Empire, even to the limited extent expected by Beseler.[41]

Despite his obvious pessimism, Beseler tried to reassure Berlin of the soundness of the multinational endeavor, offering a litany of alternative explanations for the failure of recruitment. Above all, he argued it was rational for Poles to avoid active collaboration with the Central Powers given the "uncertainty of the future" and the punishments that Petrograd would surely inflict upon traitors if they retook Congress Poland.[42] Beseler also inveighed against Vienna, arguing that their "unscrupulous agitation" had stoked Polish desires for an Austro-Polish solution.[43] He also noted that most Poles demanded a tangible institutional manifestation of the Polish state before they would enlist in the war effort.[44] However, Beseler also admitted that he had failed to grasp the complexity of Congress Poland's political landscape and its severe divisions between city and country, intelligentsia and proletariat, Russophiles and Russophobes.[45] Shocked by the Polish reactions to the call for recruits, Beseler's confidence in the German Empire's ability to direct and manipulate these socio-political forces wavered, and the beleaguered Governor-General confessed that he had no idea of how to master these factions and bridge their political divisions for Germany's ends.[46]

After roughly a paragraph of reflection on the Germany's political miscalculations, Beseler's palpable anger and frustration with Polish nationalism seeped through his report. In the following pages he vented his rage against the apparent ingratitude of the Polish population, who, he complained, had overwhelmingly failed to thank Germany and Austria-Hungary for their "liberating act" which had redeemed the "seemingly doomed" Poland from "Russification".[47] Far from it, Beseler seethed, the proclamation of Polish statehood had emboldened Polish nationalists, who now unreasonably demanded the immediate turnover of complete sovereignty to Warsaw and the dismantling of the German occupation.[48] Polish elites, Beseler declared, seemed utterly unwilling to meet Berlin halfway. Though Beseler promised to

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[36] Quoted in Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 146.

* See below.

[37] von Beseler, "Bericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 20 Dezember 1916," 16.

[38] Ibid., 19.

[39] Ibid., 16.

[40] Ibid., 20.

[41] Ibid., 17.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 20.

[45] Ibid., 17.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 16.

[48] Ibid., 18.

continue efforts to persuade Polish leaders of the value of a German-Polish union, given the "impenetrability of the Poles in the face of logically developed reasoning", he promised no results.[49] Beseler, in short, wavered in his belief that Polish nationalists could be negotiated with, and that Polish national sentiment could be compatible with German imperial interests.

By December, Beseler also worried about the fundamental stability of the occupation, and feared that the 5 November proclamation had sparked nationalist feeling that would soon explode into revolt. Nationalists' "premature" wishes for complete sovereignty, Beseler reported, were paralleled in the countryside by the misconception that the Polish state already existed and that the "occupation authorities have nothing more to say".[50] He registered rising reports of local "insubordination" among the peasantry, and scattered instances of "violent resistance" against German requisitions.[51] Beseler described the situation in the GGW as potentially "uncomfortable, even dangerous". If present efforts to form a skeletal Polish government miscarried, Beseler warned that the Polish population might take up arms in open rebellion.[52] For the first time, Beseler linked violent nationalist resistance as a more urgent threat than banditry.

This changed perspective was obvious in Beseler's description of the POW. Only a few months previously, Beseler had dismissed the nationalist paramilitary as an irrelevant, vacillating, and fringe movement, the refuge of disaffected and impoverished youths who sought a noble alternative to banditry. Now the he cursed the "wicked" POW as an existential threat to German authority in Poland.[53] The paramilitary organization, Beseler explained, had covertly "newly organized itself with the support of every possible sporting and gymnastics youth-association, students and schools, and also among the nationally-minded proletariat of the 'Polish Socialist Party' (PPS)".[54] Beseler accused The POW, now believed to be widespread and influential, of actively subverting recruitment to the Polish army and inciting resistance to German efforts to influence Warsaw.[55] Beseler further believed that the organization now "unconditionally" supported Piłsudski, who he singled out for special vitriol as a "military dilettante and Demagogue", both "insubordinate and probably lacking in serious understanding" but also exercising a "hypnotic influence" over his followers.[56] As a Polish national elite with vast popular influence but little interest in collaboration with Berlin, Piłsudski appeared to threaten both the immediate stability of the occupation and Germany's political strategy for stabilizing suzerainty in the future. For Beseler, the apparent inability to rein in such an influential political elite represented more than a setback. It constituted a fundamental threat to the viability of a multinational German-Polish union. Beseler therefore contemplated cracking down on the POW and arresting its leadership, but concluded that "this could constitute the signal for a revolt, and we are not strong enough to repress one without further [reinforcements]".[57]

Nonetheless, the Governor General remained committed to his multinational project, in part because he still saw no more promising means of resolving Germany's strategic dilemma in the region. A German-Polish union remained, for Beseler, the best model for securing Germany's imperial position in Eastern Europe and erecting an effective "border-defense" against the Russian Empire.[58] Beseler also advocated an aggressive program of reforms to salvage the political situation in occupied Poland. His core proposals focused on bulwarking the legitimacy of the nascent Kingdom of Poland and thereby enticing more active Polish investment in Germany's state-building project. To begin with, Beseler pushed for the rapid organization of a Polish government, represented by a "provisional council of state". To allay native fears of a

[49] Ibid., 21.
[50] Ibid., 19.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 22.
[53] Ibid., 20.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 22–23.
[58] Ibid.

new partition, Beseler demanded the immediate amalgamation of the GGL into the GGW.[59] Beseler thereby hoped to simultaneously abolish the need for prior consultation with Vienna over legal or administrative innovations contemplated by the GGW. Austria-Hungary, Beseler later complained, used this prerogative to stall virtually every effort by the GGW to actually organize a Polish government, often for months at a time in order to delay and sabotage Germany's efforts to incorporate Poland.[60] Though deeply suspicious and unnerved by Piłsudski's influence, given the "blind obedience of his followers", Beseler suggested modifying his political strategy and aggressively courting the self-styled marshal's support for German suzerainty. Though he admitted this would be a long-shot, Beseler was committed to recruiting elite collaboration.[61]

Beseler's conciliatory reforms and negotiations with local elites, however, were now augmented by a panoply of disciplinary measures designed to more overtly command the unruly Poland. Worried about the possibility of Polish revolt, Beseler insisted that "We must defend our position and combat erroneous views all the more energetically and resolutely, although we are unfortunately little supported by the Poles themselves".[62] Beseler concluded that "Only an iron insistence on the chosen course and ruthless elimination of all obstacles will lead us to the goal" and convince Poland's squabbling factions to unite behind Berlin's leadership.[63] Administrative unification of the GGW and GGL, Beseler clarified, would allow the occupation to more rapidly construct the organs of Polish government, but it was also necessary to monopolize the "most complete governing authority" under a single German-controlled "regent", "viceregent" [*Statthalter*], or simply the current "Governor General", himself.[64] As Beseler explained to the OHL, administrative unification would effectively invest Warsaw with "dictatorial power" to police, censor, silence, and manipulate dissent over all of Congress Poland.[65] The "guiding star" of German policy in Poland, he summarized, would be to ensure that German authorities retained real control over Poland during the war.[66] Beseler called for more soldiers to consolidate the occupations monopoly on military power.[67] He also began formulating more punitive contingency plans to mandate Polish obedience. "As we are now, without a doubt, the legitimate masters of this land[-]", Beseler explained, "so is his [Piłsudski's] conduct, strictly speaking, high treason…".[68] If the occupation proved unable to master the situation, Beseler explained, they could legally execute Piłsudski and decapitate the resistance.

When Beseler filed a new report to the Chancellery on 9 January 1917, the situation in Poland had calmed enough that Beseler no longer warned of imminent catastrophe.[69] Though he signaled his renewed faith in the multinationalist project, Beseler's frustration with Polish sentiment remained palpable, and continued to recommend more disciplinary administrative measures to buttress German control. The political situation, Beseler believed, had begun to stabilize, allowing German authorities to more clearly identify sympathetic "activists" and skeptical "passivists" and maneuver accordingly.[70] Unfortunately, Beseler admitted, occupation officials had discovered that the passivist camp in Poland had started to slough its formerly Russophile and ambivalent disposition, and transform into a more solidly pro-independence movement.[71] Beseler also complained that the Roman Catholic Episcopate and lower clergy,

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[59] Ibid., 18.
[60] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 5 January 1917," January 5, 1917, 12, N30/14, BArch.
[61] von Beseler, "Bericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 20 Dezember 1916," 20–22.
[62] Ibid., 19.
[63] Ibid., 17.
[64] Ibid., 18.
[65] von Beseler, "Letter to Ober Ost Explaining the Political Situation in Poland, 24 November 1916," 126.
[66] Ibid.
[67] von Beseler, "Bericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 20 Dezember 1916," 22.
[-] Here Beseler cited international law which accorded an occupying power temporary stewardship of territory until the resolution of conflict.
[68] von Beseler, "Bericht des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 20 Dezember 1916," 21.
[69] von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 5 January 1917," 8.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

which the Governor General had believed would be essential in channeling Polish national sentiment to German ends, were proving hesitant to back a German-Polish union without explicit instructions from Rome.[72] Even conservatives among the Polish political elite were demanding an unacceptable share of political power as a prerequisite to joining the Provisional Council of State.[73] In short, Beseler rapidly grew frustrated that, contrary to expectations, relatively few Polish elites were willing to collaborate on the German Empire's terms.

His irritation with political and social elites mirrored the Governor General's feelings towards the Polish-speaking population as a whole. "The aversion to voluntary army service", appeared to be growing, not shrinking.[74] Beseler complained that the Polish masses suffered from a "deep demoralization, barren materialism, parochialism and lacking education" which fostered seemingly "insurmountable" national oppositions.[75] He still considered this nationalism a legacy of decades of Russian misrule, yet Beseler now worried that this legacy had trained Poles to be suspicious of non-Poles. Frustrated by his inability to recruit elite Polish collaboration, and worried that popular nationalism might prove more rigid than previously imagined, Beseler now admitted that under the best circumstances pro-German political sentiment would take a long time to develop in the Kingdom of Poland. "Only slowly and tirelessly" he wrote, could the Poles be "trained" to accept and collaborate with German suzerainty.[76]

Beseler again emphasized his continuing commitment to the multinationalist project, stressing that Berlin could not "eschew" this difficult work, as the creation of a "powerful, capable and defensible Polish state" in military union with the German Empire remained in "simply critical for our future security against Russia".[77] He still hoped that a cooperative working relationship between the GGW and the TRS would affect a "turn" or transformation in Polish public opinion.[78] However, the he realized that the recruitment crisis had severely deteriorated the credibility of the multinational project throughout military and policy circles. He therefore pleaded with Berlin to delay any fundamental changes to imperial policy until occupation authorities in Warsaw understood how Congress Poles would regard the TRS, and whether it would begin to consolidate patriotic opinion around the new Kingdom of Poland.[79] Nonetheless the reluctance of Poles to voluntarily collaborate had severely shaken Beseler's own confidence. He now continued to ponder a more compulsory, rather than transactional, relationship with the Polish population. In particular, he wondered if the GGW should force Warsaw to conscript soldiers into their national army. After all, he wrote, "The Poles are accustomed to obey".[80]

The recruitment crisis branded Beseler with an enduring pessimism about German prospects about Poland. He realized the precariousness of the occupation's hold over Poland, the obstacles that faced his multinationalist policy, and the consequences of failure for the German Empire. Even after the situation had stabilized, Beseler confided in a 24 January 1917 letter to the Chancellor that, if the GGW did not proceed carefully in the state-building project, the "old hatred of Germany" might "flare in the whole country".[81] An optimistic champion of multinationalism only three months before, Beseler now wrote:

> It would not be surprising if, instead of the desired and pursued fortified border, we would receive one yet less secure and worse than was in 1914. Because beyond this boreder, instead of a liberated and satisfied nation, as we had hoped

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 10.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 9.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 9, 15.
[78] Ibid., 9.
[79] Ibid., 10.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 24 January 1917," January 24, 1917, 37, N30/14, BArch.

for, a fanatical enemy [would] stand between Russia and us.[82]

The recruitment crisis put Beseler on the defensive. Throughout 1917, the Governor General almost invariably began his memoranda and political reports with the admission that the proclamation of 5 November hadn't developed "in a direction altogether desired by us" or that voluntary enlistment had "failed" because the GGW had "completely misunderstood the national pride of the Poles".[83] Polish activists, he surmised, had either grossly overestimated their own influence, or deliberately misrepresented the likely "active participation of the people in the war".[84] Though still hopeful that Berlin could gradually cultivate pro-German sentiment in occupied Poland, Beseler had come to doubt the influence, judgment, and even the reliability of Polish political elites. Beseler therefore dramatically lowered his own expectations for the GGW, later writing that due to the "shortsightedness" of the Poles, he no longer foresaw Poland fielding any substantial national army in the present war.[85]

The failure of recruitment also deeply troubled military circles, and many officers and generals began to question whether Berlin would be wise to train a Polish national army and entrust it with the defense of the empire's eastern frontier. Hermann von Strantz, an infantry general who had led units into France in 1914, went out of his way to submit a memorandum on Polish Policy to Berlin on 29 November, despite having no official responsibility in the matter. Germany, he argued had "overestimated the popular influence of the Russophobic intelligentsia".[86] Strantz believed Poles, especially their clergy, to be favorably disposed to the Russian Empire and to have little or no interests in collaboration with the German Empire.[87] Strantz severely criticized the GGW's "honest accommodation" of the Polish nation, which he believed Polish nationalists had interpreted as a sign of "weakness".[88] He now called upon the GGW and imperial leadership to crack down on nationalist agitation as a show of strength.

In the OHL, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were deeply concerned by the recruitment crisis. Though unwilling to abandon the aim of German suzerainty, both supported drastic policy adjustments to protect German interests in Congress Poland.[·] Hindenburg remained, as always, the more skeptical of multinationalism. "Since the formation of the Polish army has been so delayed and there is no prospect of obtaining Polish divisions by the end of April", Hindenburg saw little "value" in working to "accommodate" Polish nationalists and rapidly building a Polish state.[89] The Kingdom of Poland was no longer a priority for him. After reading Beseler's deeply pessimistic report from 20 December, Hindenburg wrote the Chancellery to demand a change of course in the management of the GGW. Hindenburg saw Beseler's report as a declaration of "bankruptcy" of Beseler's "political effect in Warsaw", and proposed replacing the ineffective Governor General with his own favorite, Colonel General von Falkenhausen.[90]

The OHL's revised territorial demands in Eastern Europe confirm their desire to take a firmer hand with the Polish population. At the Chancellor's request, the OHL submitted a new program of war aims on 23 December 1916.[91] Apparently concerned about Warsaw's loyalty, the OHL called for substantial reductions in Polish territory and the systematic containment of the

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[82] Ibid.
[83] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 137–39.
[84] Ibid., 138.
[85] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Note to Paul von Hindenburg, 6 June 1917," June 6, 1917, 44, N30/11, BArch.
[86] Strantz, "Die Deutsche Politik Gegenüber Den Polen. Gutachten Aus Lodz," November 29, 1916, 136, R1501/119795, BArch.
[87] Ibid., 135.
[88] Ibid., 138.
[·] It would be wrong to suggest, as previous historians have, that the failure of recruitment led to the immediate collapse of support for multinational imperialism in the OHL (see, Fischer 322). Ludendorff, for instance continued to support the eventual creation of a German-Polish union after December 1916, and indeed called for the administrative unification of the GGW and GGL under a single German authority to expedite the state-building process in Poland. (See below)
[89] Quoted in Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 38.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 316.

future Polish state. To insulate Germany from Polish skullduggery, the OHL firmly reasserted the need for annexations along the western border of Congress Poland, claiming Germany's frontier should extend, at a minimum, along the Warta-Bzura-Vistula-Narew-Bobr line.[92]

The chaotic situation in Poland now strengthened the OHL's position on the need to annex territory east of Congress Poland. Hindenburg repeated his demands for German annexations around Brest, and an independent Ukrainian state to Poland's southeast.[93] He now bluntly justified these measures as necessary to diplomatically isolate Warsaw and contain the military power of the Polish state, ensuring that the Kingdom of Poland were surrounded from three directions by the German Empire or an unsympathetic associated state. "The experiences with Poland make it indispensible", Hindenburg wrote to the Chancellor, "that Germany contains Poland and not the other way around, and that the border between Poland and Russia be as narrow as possible", presumably to hinder Polish-Russian collaboration against Germany.[94]

The failure of recruitment similarly concerned civilian agencies of the imperial government. For the most part, however, these agencies hoped that pro-Polish reforms would satisfy Polish demands and restore the faltering German-Polish relationship. Wilhelmstraße was quick to notice the mounting unrest in Poland. On 17 November, the newly-promoted State Secretary of the Foreign Office, Arthur Zimmermann, telegrammed Mutius to recommend the immediate establishment of an actual Polish royal government in the hopes of restoring the legitimacy of the Polish state.[95] It was ultimately left to the Chancellor to decide if the German Empire should adopt Beseler's more conservative tactics to discipline and prod Warsaw, or the OHL's more radical policy of prophylactic containment. Bethmann Hollweg chose the former, noting in the margins of Hindenburg's letter that to adopt in new course in Poland was "completely out of the question".[96] In mid- January, he sent a letter to Beseler, reassuring the beleaguered Governor General that the Chancellery still "emphatically" supported the GGW's project to establish Germany's "military and political leadership" over the Kingdom of Poland.[97]

Overall, the recruitment crisis was a serious, but not irrecoverable, blow to the credibility of multinational imperialism. The embarrassing response to recruitment and instability in occupied Poland disheartened multinationalists throughout the German government. Few however, actually moved to abandon the project as the result of this experience alone. It seems that the constant warnings of Beseler and others to regard the Kingdom of Poland as a long-term investment, had at least insulated Berlin from the shock of this setback. Moreover, mixed among the disappointed reports and despondent memoranda on the situation in Poland were also scattered reports indicating at least some success in building support for collaboration among the occupied population. One report from the German consulate in Bern noted former Russian loyalist Poles had begun to defect, some even travelling via Switzerland to assist in building the new Kingdom of Poland. One high-profile activist had converted specifically because the 5 November proclamation had convinced him that loyal cooperation with the Central Powers would best serve Poland's interests.[98] Both Berlin and the GGW continued their efforts to build an autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire.

Beseler led the GGW in a two pronged-strategy to rapidly build a nascent Polish government that the Congress Poland's population would regard as legitimate. He first moved to deliver on promises to build Polish government institutions. Already on 12 November, without consulting representatives of the Austro-Hungarian government, the Governor General announced plans for the creation of a Polish "Provisional Council of State" (*Tymczasowa Rada Stanu* or TRS) with responsibility for advising occupation authorities and organizing the further

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[92] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 119.
[93] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 317.
[94] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 119.
[95] Arthur Zimmermann, "Telegram to Gerhard von Mutius, 17 November 1916," November 17, 1916, 171–72, N30/13, BArch.
[96] Quoted in Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 38.
[97] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 17 January 1917," January 17, 1917, 23, N30/14, BArch.
[98] Romberg, "Consular Report from Bern, 13 January 1917," January 13, 1917, 14, R1501/119717, BArch.

formation of the Polish state.[99] Before the end of the month, negotiations with Vienna had confirmed Beseler's decision to establish a Provisional Council of State as a "legitimate body or authority".[100] The occupying powers agreed on a 25 member council, with 15 members selected from the GGW, and 10 from the GGL. The TRS was to direct its own activities and elect its own Crown Marshall, though each occupation would designate a *Regierungskommissar* to surveil the council's activities. Its competence would be limited to organizing a Polish state administration, planning for the Kingdom of Poland's future constitutional development, and working with the Central Powers to establish a Polish national army.[101] The GGW worked with Polish elites to draft a list of mutually acceptable candidates for the TRS.[102] This proved especially difficult, as German administrators in Warsaw somehow needed to engineer a council which would guide Polish state-building towards union with the German Empire, while appearing to faithfully mirror broader, predominantly passivist, Polish opinion.[103] Beseler therefore sought alliances with unlikely figures as he patched together the TRS. The GGW nominated Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski, a conservative magnate and moderate passivist, to the TRS, and worked intently to cultivate an alliance with him.[104]

Secondly, Beseler concentrated on directly restoring the occupation's trustworthiness among the Polish population. In communications with Congress Poland's various political parties and organizations, the GGW tried to manage Polish expectations. Beseler and others clarified that the occupation would "temporarily" control of Congress Poland throughout the war, even as it built "those state institutions [that] will guarantee the firm foundation, formation and security of your state".[105] The Governor General issued new orders and guidelines to occupation troops in late November, dropping former restrictions on fraternization between soldiers and residents.[106] Though still instructed to avoid political discussions, German personnel were encouraged to develop "friendly relationships" with locals, with the ultimate aim of fostering "mutual understanding" and "relationships of trust" between Poles and Germans.[107]

Gathering Polish notables in the Warsaw royal castle on the evening of 15 December, Beseler also personally made the case for continued collaboration with the GGW.[108] Here he assured Polish elites that the German Empire was working to "gradually" build a legitimate Polish state and promised that Berlin had no agenda of "Germanization" or "subjugation".[109] At the same time, Beseler gestured openly to plans to establish German suzerainty over the Kingdom of Poland. His speech described Poland as an "autonomous state" with treaties placing it under the protection and "leadership" of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, though he clearly implied Germany would be the senior partner in this relationship.[110] Beseler articulated two main arguments in support of a German-Polish union. First, Poland required Germany's practical assistance in state-building, because a century of Russian mismanagement had left the country without the legions of trained bureaucrats, teachers, jurists, engineers, and army officers required for a modern state.[111] Second, but more importantly, Beseler detailed a federalist

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[99] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 83; Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Telegram to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 17 November 1916," November 17, 1916, 170, N30/13, BArch.
[100] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 138.
[101] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau über die politische Lage in Polen, 13 October 1917," October 13, 1917, 181, N30/9, BArch.
[102] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 83.
[103] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 138.
[104] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 86.
[105] Helfritz, "Reply to Polish National Council Petition, 17 November 1916," November 17, 1916, 102, N30/21, BArch; Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Public Notice on the Continued Authority of the Occupation, 30 December 1916," December 30, 1916, 302, N30/21, BArch; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 56.
[106] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Secret Memorandum to Military Units and Military Governors in the GGW, 20 November 1916," November 20, 1916, 38, N30/6, BArch.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 87.
[109] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Ansprache des Generalgouverneurs Hans von Beseler in Warschau, 15 Dezember 1916," Dezember 1916, 10, PH30-II/55, BArch.
[110] Ibid., 4, 10–12, 16.
[111] Ibid., 7.

narrative of legitimacy for a German-Polish union. Poland, he repeated *ad nauseum*, simply needed the military protection of the German Empire to secure itself from Russian expansionism, and accompanying "Russification".[112] Beseler cautioned that a fully independent Kingdom of Poland, even if it stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea, would be too geographically exposed and militarily weak to defend itself in a war with Russia.[113] Poland, Beseler state simply, faced a choice between the security of a German-Polish union, or being "overrun" by Russia.[114] "If you want to fulfill a great cultural mission", he declared, "you must join yourselves to another great body, not politically, not nationally, not culturally, but before all things militarily".[115] Only such a "union" [*Anschluß*] could clear the way for a "truly secure and great development of the country".[116] Beseler admitted that the German Empire's own strategic security demanded suzerainty over Poland. If the Russians return to Congress Poland, "then we Germans would ourselves have the same miserable and woeful border-situation, that we had in 1914".[117] Berlin had a significant interest in fashioning a "strong and powerful" Poland as a permanent ally, to finally secure Germany's eastern frontier.[118] Germany's dependence on the Kingdom of Poland for its own security, Beseler assured his audience, would guarantee that Germany would stubbornly defend Poland in any future war.[119] The military fates of the German Empire and the Kingdom of Poland, he concluded, were intertwined, and Germany aimed to build a powerful Polish army, trained and equipped Prussian standards, as a "vanguard" of the German Army.[120] Beseler ended his address by enjoining the assembled Polish notables to begin proselytizing to those segments of the Polish peasantry still "de-nationalized" or apathetic, and convert them to this particular vision of pro-imperial Polish nationalism.[121]

Internal reports indicated a mixed reception of Beseler's address among the notables, with some accepting his logic and others remaining skeptical.[122] Positive coverage of the address in the Polish press encouraged GGW functionaries, and began to restore faith in the malleability of Polish national politics.[123] The *Gazeta Polska* emphasized that Beseler was naturally focused solely on German interests, but noted that, "what he said of the commonality of German and Polish interests in this great war must convince every reasonably thinking man" and that the "best Polish patriot" could offer no better political advice than him.[124] The article ended by calling upon its readers to enthusiastically build a Polish state and army, so that Warsaw could secure a more favorable treaty relationship with Germany at the end of the war.[125]

Beseler's intensive efforts to rehabilitate the legitimacy of the Kingdom of Poland began to see moderate success in late 1916. Archbishop Kakowski had refused Hutten Czapski's offer to join the TRS in late November, dashing hopes for broad ecclesiastical support of a German-Polish union.[126] However, centrist Activists like Studnicki and his *Klub* remained committed to collaboration and worked eagerly with the GGW to organize the TRS. On 22 December, the CKN publicly declared its willingness to cooperate in forming a TRS and a Polish national army, lending Piłsudski's tentative imprimatur to the project.[127] Passivists, led by the *Endecja* and conservative loyalists via the Inter-Party Political Circle, began to fracture as aristocrats like

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[112] Ibid., 3–4, 13.
[113] Ibid., 12–16.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 12.
[116] Ibid., 15.
[117] Ibid., 4.
[118] Ibid., 15.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 12.
[121] Ibid., 2, 5, 13.
[122] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 87.
[123] Jaworski, "Report by GGW Press Department, 2 January 1917," January 2, 1917, 49, N30/22, BArch.
[124] Ibid., 51.
[125] Ibid., 52.
[126] Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler on Discussions with Archbishop Kakowski, 29 November 1916," November 29, 1916, 142, N30/21, BArch.
[127] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 88.

Count Adam Ronikier led the National Party into tenuous collaboration with the Central Powers.[128] They joined reluctantly, hoping to exercise at least some influence on events and avoid a purely puppet regime.[129] In January 1917, the Provisional Council of State convened as the nominal head of the new Polish state. Of the GGW's 15 members, seven represented activist factions and the remaining eight were either moderate Passivists or politically unattached. Understandably, German authorities refrained from appointing any Endeks to the TRS.[130] Lerchenfeld-Koefering was appointed as the GGW's state commissioner overseeing the activities of the TRS.[131]

Key multinationalists actually wanted to push German reforms further. Both Beseler and Mutius felt that the German Empire should demonstrate its commitment to Polish statehood by naming a Polish Regent* from one of Germany's royal dynasties.[132] Appointing a regent, both argued, would institutionally realize the promises of 5 November, and establish a Polish executive to lead further state-building efforts. Multinationalists agreed that the Regent had to be a German prince. Given the Regency's central role in shaping Poland's constitution and treaty relationships with the Central Powers, occupation authorities in Warsaw believed that a German Prince as Regent of Poland would finally sink the Austro-Polish solution and lead the new state into military and political union with the German Empire. They hoped that the Regency would prejudice the selection of Poland's new royal dynasty. A German Prince who performed well as Regent, they hoped, would eventually assume the Polish crown with the approval of Polish notables. Occupation authorities strongly discouraged the nomination of a Regent from a Polish aristocratic line, not because they believed the families lacked talent or competence, but rather because they feared the nomination process would breed a fratricidal competition among the Polish candidates.[133] Keen to flesh out the Polish state, Beseler considered the Regent question carefully, and offered specific and actionable recommendations to Berlin. He rejected a Bavarian candidate because he feared handing the keys to Germany's new eastern fortress to the Wittelsbachs risked reintroducing a corrosive North-South dualism to Central European politics which might eventually threaten German integrity.[134] As Polish sensibilities would demand the dignity of a royal line and baptism in the Roman Catholic Church for any Regent, this left only Wettin and Württemberg candidates. At this point, Beseler personally recommended Prince Friedrich Christian of Saxony, possibly because of the Wettins' historic claims to Polish throne.[135]

The GGW complimented the organization of a Polish executive with new efforts to paint the Polish army as a convincingly national institution. In November 1916, Beseler agreed to absorb the Polish Legions into the new national army, writing to his wife that "I hope that now the Poles will come, since the will see that they are to be Polish soldiers, not German".[136] Beseler established a training command as an embryonic General Staff for the new Polish army, overseen by the Saxon General Felix Barth and the Polish commander Władysław Sikorski.[137] The GGW likewise scrapped measures for compulsory labor recruitment in December, deeming them both inefficient and inimical to the larger goal of fostering German-Polish collaboration.[138]

By the end of the year, the GGW had managed to stabilize the political situation in

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[128] Ibid., 84, 87.
[129] Ibid., 87.
[130] Ibid., 88–89.
[131] Ibid., 88.
* The Regent would serve as the Kingdom of Poland's provisional head of state. Though neither official wanted to designate the Regent as Poland's future King, both believed that such a Regent would be a natural candidate for the throne.
[132] Gerhard von Mutius, "Report to Arthur Zimmermann, 31 November 1916," November 31, 1916, 192, N30/13, BArch; von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 14 November 1916," 162; von Beseler, "Letter to Ober Ost Explaining the Political Situation in Poland, 24 November 1916," 125.
[133] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, 14 November 1916," 165.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 166.
[136] Quoted in Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 90.
[137] Ibid., 91.
[138] Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation," 96.

Poland. But the German administration now faced an additional problem. Having attempted to build a Polish army during the war, Berlin had effectively tied the perceived legitimacy of the Polish state, and the prospects of multinational imperialism, to the successful formation of a Polish army. German authorities could not simply abandon their efforts to field a Polish army during the war, as this would suggest that Germany was actively dismantling a key safeguard of Poland's future autonomy. Hesitation now, Beseler noted, would consolidate mistrust among Poland's political elite, and scuttle any hopes for recruiting collaboration.[139] Nor could the GGW allow the army to languish, as this would do violence to German prestige. Because Germany had opted to begin military recruitment during the war, it had to continue along this path, with at least a modicum of success, to maintain credibility for the multinationalist project.

The failure of Polish recruitment had also caused a stir in the German press. Nationalizing imperialists rushed to cite this setback as vindication of their warnings against Polish statehood. One anonymous brochure, quickly censored by the German government, pointed to the recruitment shortfall as proof that the foundation of the Polish state was the "most terrible" way the Chancellor could have wronged the German nation.[140] The project, he argued, was obviously doomed because a Polish state "can never become a friend of the Germans" as it would inevitably plot to steal Prussian territory.[141] Believing that the 5 November proclamation had only destabilized German control of the region by encouraging Polish nationalists, the author demanded Bethmann Hollweg's immediate resignation.[142] The *Ostmarkenverein* likewise pounced upon the recruitment crisis to claim vindication for their long opposition to multinational imperialism. In a new memorandum circulated in the imperial government, the *Ostmarkenverein* argued that Polish reluctance to join the war effort had categorically disproven multinationalists' central assumption that Poles would accept German leadership to repulse Russia. On both sides of the border, they argued, Poles remained either "mistrustful" or "hostile" to German authority.[143] To safeguard Germany from Polish irredentism, the OMV demanded that the new Polish TRS be forced to publicly renounce all claims to Prussian territory.[144] Regardless of the future international status of the Polish state, they also demanded that the Prussian *Ostmark* be secured through the compulsory "emigration" of Polish Prussians.[145]

The recruitment setback put multinationalist intellectuals on the defensive. Publicists like Delbrück remained optimistic about Germany's ability to build a Polish state as a reliable component of its empire. He quoted Polish papers which prioritized collaboration with Berlin to successfully build a Polish state.[146] However Delbrück now had to explain the recent miscarriage of imperial policy. He ultimately blamed the Prussian Interior Ministry for alienating Polish opinion by failing to repeal the 1908 expropriation law.[147] To win the loyalty of the Polish state, Delbrück insisted, Berlin needed to earn the trust of Polish Prussians. Poles were to be convinced that they "may remain Poles" throughout Germany's emerging "association of states".[148]

Stabilization and new Distrust: German aims in early 1917

The new year brought new frustrations to multinationalists in Berlin and Warsaw. Austria-Hungary, whilst privately confirming their recognition of Germany's "claim to military hegemony in Poland", refused to publicly divest their own ambitions for an Austro-Polish solution, or allow for the administrative unification of the GGL and GGW to expedite state-

[139] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 24 January 1917," 38.
[140] Anonymous Brochure, "Die Politik des Herrn von Bethmann-Hollweg," January 1917, 15, N2069/1, BArch.
[141] Ibid., 15–16.
[142] Ibid., 16.
[143] Ostmarkenverein, "Zur polnischen Frage," January 1917, 1, N30/36, BArch.
[144] Ibid., 1–2.
[145] Ibid., 2. Specifically, the OMV hoped to circumvent legal concerns by negotiating with Warsaw to exchange Polish and German populations.
[146] Hans Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga – das Königreich Polen. die Zivil-Dienstpflicht. der Regierungswechsel in Oesterreich-Ungarn," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, November 26, 1916, 88.
[147] Ibid., 87.
[148] Ibid., 89.

building decisions. Czernin claimed that renouncing Austrian interest would undermine Vienna's prestige, and might even demoralize the front. Beseler suspected Habsburg skullduggery, fearing that Vienna was covertly enflaming Polish "mistrust" and "fanatical hatred" against Germany in the hopes that Berlin would abandon its plans for Poland.[149]

Berlin's resolve stabilized as the situation in Poland calmed. Beseler managed to reassure the imperial government that the GGW remained in command of the situation, and that Polish opinion of German statebuilding efforts was improving. Convening the TRS in January revived Beseler's flagging hopes, and he noted his belief that the Polish elite were coming to see Berlin's position, and would soon issue their own call for Polish army volunteers.[150] The imperial government followed Beseler's recommendation to persist in their efforts to form a German-Polish union. Zimmerman continued the Foreign Office's negotiations with Czernin to secure Germany's exclusive "military and political leadership" over Poland.[151] Despite calling for a change in leadership in the GGW, Hindenburg still personally encouraged Zimmerman to secure a "binding written agreement" with Vienna on Germany's future suzerainty over Poland.[152]

German resolve was apparent in the GGW's efforts to train, and secure wartime control, over the embryonic Polish army. Since 15 December 1916, the occupation had focused its efforts on retraining the Polish Legions to the standards of a regular army and incorporating the trickle of recruits that advertisements had managed to enlist.[153] Beseler and Barth hoped to fashion these first trainees into the future officer corps of the Polish army, and to eventually use them to train further cohorts of officers and non-commissioned officers.[154] Polish units were trained to use heavy weapons, practicing with field guns and howitzers. By February, the Polish army numbered roughly 3,200 men, mostly former legionnaires.[155] Beseler believed that retraining the Polish infantry and cavalry to German standards had met with "good success", enough so that he now intended to begin assembling and training Poland's first General Staff.[156]

To whom these future staff officers ultimately swore allegiance presented a thornier issue. German policy-makers interpreted paragraph eight of the Pless Agreement of October 1916 as granting the German Empire the exclusive right of supreme command over the Polish army, immediately and indefinitely.[157] With the Polish throne empty, Germans had initially assumed that Polish soldiers would swear a service-oath which specified the German Kaiser as their supreme wartime commander. Yet Vienna insisted on revising this oath to name both the German and Austro-Hungarian Kaisers, and keep the Polish question symbolically open.[158] This infuriated German leaders. Beseler considered it a flagrant betrayal of the Pless agreement.[159]

But this also presented German planners with a practical question of how much they could concede to Austrian vanity without endangering German influence in the Kingdom of Poland. The question assumed exaggerated significance in light of the recent recruitment crisis. At a 13 February conference in Berlin, discussion of the issue revealed emerging disagreements among German leaders over the necessary severity of occupation policy. Policy-makers gathered to discuss the Polish service oath, though Beseler understood the meeting as a broader review of

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[149] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 17 January 1917," 24.
[150] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 24 January 1917," 38.
[151] Arthur Zimmermann, "Report on Foreign Office Meeting with Ottokar Czernin, 16 January 1917," January 16, 1917, 4, N30/11, BArch.
[152] Ibid., 5.
[153] Civil Administration of the GGW, "Retraining of the Legions According to German Specifications," February 1917, 51, N30/14, BArch.
[154] Ibid., 53.
[155] Civil Administration of the GGW, "Our Recruitment Measures and Their Results," February 1917, 50, N30/14, BArch.
[156] Civil Administration of the GGW, "Retraining of the Legions According to German Specifications," 53–54.
[157] Civil Administration of the GGW, "Materials Compiled to Brief the Governor General before the Berlin Conference," February 8, 1917, 48, N30/14, BArch.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

multinational imperial policy, and prepared accordingly.[160] Worried that plans for a German-Polish union were in danger of losing the confidence of key imperial agencies, Beseler intended to emphasize recent GGW successes and lay out Warsaw's plans for binding the Polish army to German command through training and inspection procedures.[161] His top priority was to convince his colleagues of Germany's necessarily "inalterable" imperial agenda: "An autonomous Polish state, closely attached politically, militarily, and economically to Germany".[162]

Beseler's concerns proved warranted, and the 13 February meeting uncovered German policy-makers's new distrust of Poles. The evening meeting in the Chancellery gathered virtually every relevant top official; The Chancellor, his subordinates Wahnschaffe and Heinrichs, Zimmermann from the Foreign Office, von Stein from the Prussian War Ministry, Ludendorff and his subordinate von Bartenwerffer, and Beseler, Kries, and Lerchenfeld.[163] Beseler opened the meeting with a long explanation meant to reassure his audience about the plausibility of building a reliable Polish state under German Suzerainty. He stressed that the organization of the TRS had stabilized the political situation, and he argued that Germany could cooperate with its "loyal, willing" members who "trusted" German "leadership".[164] While he stated that he understood concerns about the long-term reliability of a Polish state, Beseler portrayed the recent political stabilization as signalling a "great turnaround" in Polish national sentiment and insisted that intelligent policy could "gradually improve" Polish trust in the German Empire.[165] Beseler identified the Polish army as Germany's primary lever for "shaping" the future European east.[166] Beseler suggested that the "Two-Kaiser Oath" proposed by Vienna was the diplomatically intelligent choice. After conversations with the TRS, Beseler believed that the Polish government would accept the "German Oath". But he warned that "uneducated and mistrustful Poles" might perceive it as surreptitious Germanization. The "Two-Kaiser Oath" would bring in more Polish recruits, while still allowing Germany to effectively "chain" Poland to the German Empire through its control of training, equipment, and military inspections.[167] Beseler urged his colleagues to accept the compromise oath to bolster recruitment numbers, and perhaps more importantly, because the TRS needed an immediate political victory upon which it could begin building the kingdom's legitimacy.[168]

On 13 February, the *Reichsleitung* reached a firm consensus on the continued necessity of forming a German-Polish union as the centerpiece of Germany's imperial agenda in Eastern Europe.[169] Even the OHL wanted to "adhere" to the objective of a German-Polish union.[170] The assembled parties further agreed with Beseler that German influence over the Polish army was essential for establishing German suzerainty. As the Chancellor noted, "If we have the army, Poland is firmly in our hands".[171] But on the specific question of the service oath, consensus broke down. Most civilian leaders, including Zimmerman, Helfferich, and Bethmann Hollweg agreed with Beseler's recommendation to swallow the "Two-Kaiser oath" to secure Polish support for the Central Powers and buy time while the German occupation established broader support for a German-Polish union.[172] However, Ludendorff, though he still supported multinational imperialism, demanded more rigorous guarantees for German control in Warsaw in light of Poles' recent suspect behavior. Ludendorff questioned the very plausibility of Polish

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[160] Reichskanzlei, "Sitzung im Reichskanzler-Palais, Dienstag den 13. Febr. 17, 5 Uhr Nachmittag," February 13, 1917, 86, N30/14, BArch.
[161] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Vorarbeiten und Gesichtspunkte für die Berliner Besprechung am 13 Februar 1917," February 8, 1917, 40, N30/14, BArch.
[162] Ibid., 41.
[163] Reichskanzlei, "Sitzung im Reichskanzler-Palais, Dienstag den 13. Febr. 17, 5 Uhr Nachmittag," 85.
[164] Ibid., 86.
[165] Ibid., 87, 94.
[166] Ibid., 87.
[167] Ibid., 89, 97–99.
[168] Ibid., 89.
[169] Ibid., 90–91, 98.
[170] Ibid., 91.
[171] Ibid., 90.
[172] Ibid., 92–93, 95.

collaboration with the German Empire, noting that the success of recruitment is still "doubtful".[173] Ludendorff therefore insisted on the "German-Oath". "If the Poles want to come at all," he argued, "they will also come with this oath".[174] "Through the Oath", Ludendorff continued, the Poles must "feel themselves subordinated to the German Kaiser".[175] He wanted to simultaneously use the "German Oath" as a test for Polish reliability and as a bludgeon to rhetorically assert German imperial supremacy.

> Poland can now show if it wants to go with Germany at all. It must now be finally shown to them, that we are to have command and not them. We have conceded enough, now they should finally bring something to us.[176]

Ludendorff articulated a rational, though uncompromising position, arguing that if Poles would not willingly accept German leadership now, multinational union was not worth the risk.

Worried that he might be over-exposing the multinationalist project, Beseler walked back his statements on the central value of the Polish army. Though important, Beseler argued that the "meaning of the Polish question should not be dependent on the success of the military formation".[177] The Chancellor finally ended the ensuing argument between Beseler and Ludendorff by referring the matter to the Kaiser for final decision.[178] Due to the Kaiser's illness, Bethmann Hollweg was unable to discuss the matter with Wilhelm II for several weeks, and the text of the oath remained undecided. Despite its minor significance in terms of policy, the 13 February 1917 Berlin conference vividly demonstrates that growing doubts in Polish reliability were pushing skeptics like Ludendorff to endorse more disciplinary approaches to Polish policy.

Revolution in Russia and Stagnation in Poland, Spring 1917.

The abdication of the Tsar and the emergence of the Russian Provisional Government in February 1917 introduced new variables into the debate over Polish policy. The emergence of a liberal regime in Russia could offer residents of the Kingdom of Poland new, potentially attractive, alternatives to German suzerainty, Austrian trialism, and Russian autocracy. Without the looming threat of Tsarism in the east, German multinationalists lost a compelling villain against which Berlin and Warsaw needed to unite and raised the possibility that Poland might plausibly survive as a fully independent, sovereign state. German observers also worried that Russian Polish subjects might want to return to a now liberal Russian state.[179] Petrograd only raised concerns over such a restoration with its gestures towards federalization and the recognition of an "independent Poland".[180]

At the same time, deteriorating relations with the United States further complicated German policy in Poland. In a 21 January 1917 meeting with the nationalist activist Ignacy Paderewski, President Wilson had already expressed interest in forming an independent Polish state with access to the sea as part of a comprehensive peace settlement in Europe.[181] In April 1917 Washington had declared war on the German Empire. As Tsarism collapsed and America emerged as a new patron of Polish independence, the entente powers dropped their opposition to Polish independence in the spring of April 1917, greatly diminishing the theoretical draw of German suzerainty.[182]

In Warsaw, news of the revolution frightened Beseler. He did not believe that the

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[173] Ibid., 91.
[174] Ibid., 92.
[175] Ibid., 93.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid., 100.
[179] Jesse Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation: State Building and Nation Bildung in Poland during the Great War," *First World War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 73.
[180] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 386–87.
[181] Ibid., 2:387.
[182] Ibid., 2:387–88.

February revolution had conclusively dashed hopes for a stable German-Polish union. The Polish peasantry, he noted, had been loyal subjects of Nicholas II, and with the Tsar dethroned, he hoped their fealty to Petrograd would evaporate.[183] With their autocratic patron gone, Beseler also believed that Russophile Polish magnates would depend upon German suzerainty to stabilize a monarchy and prevent land reforms.[184] Overall Beseler estimated that revolution had actually undercut russophilic passivism.[185] Unfortunately, he conceded, the defanging of the Russian imperial threat meant that this development had not been accompanied by any stellar growth in support for "union with the Central Powers".[186] In April Beseler therefore began accelerating the transfer of responsibility for matters of justice and education into the hands of the growing Polish administration. He further recommended offering a detailed timeline for the transfer of domestic authority into the hands of the TRS.[187]

Observers in the RAI similarly worried that the Russian revolution had suddenly weakened an important justification for German suzerainty. Reports suggested that the democratic and liberal rhetoric of the revolution would calm fears of the left wing nationalists around Piłsudski, and effectively free them to more vigorously pursue independence.[188] To the RAI, the loss of this large and publicly credible nationalist faction seemed a poor trade for the tentative forbearance of previously loyalist aristocrats.[189] Indeed, Berlin worried that the exchange would actually obstruct German attempts to mold the peasant opinion, given the peasantry's disdain for landowning magnates and the land reforms that the PPS might offer them.[190]

The Russian revolution muddied the waters of Polish national sentiment at a moment when multinationalist thinkers craved clarity and progress towards a healthy German-Polish relationship. Suffering from the spectacular disappointment of the previous year, lack of visible demonstrations of Polish enthusiasm for the German war effort kept multinationalist writers on the defensive, and even undermined their confidence in the eventual plausibility of multinational union. Even Friedrich Naumann voiced frustration with a lack of visible Polish collaboration. Naumann still supported the German Empire's efforts to build a "dependable" Polish state under Germany's leadership though in the context of *Mitteleuropa*.[191] Writing in March, he urged patience, and reassured his readers that not all Poles were inveterate greater-Polish nationalists.[192] But he conceded that the announcement of a Polish Kingdom had not been the "blinding" success he had hoped for.[193] He chastised passivists in Congress Poland who refused to assist in building a new Polish state in confederation with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and instead waited for a future "historical moment of uprising" to make a fully independent state.[194] Naumann did not merely vent his anger against Polish intransigence. He also began to consider the possibility that Polish nationalists might betray or revolt against Berlin and Vienna.[195] Naumann's growing concerns were obvious in his book, *Was Wird Aus Polen?* , penned during his tour of occupied Poland in March 1917. The book opened with a paternalistic chiding of Poles for failing to renounce national claims to Galicia and Posen and gratefully accept a "Varsovian Kingdom".[196] Naumann sympathized with occupation soldiers who complained about the

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[183] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 139.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 12 April 1917," April 12, 1917, 113, N30/14, BArch.
[188] Imperial Office of the Interior, "Record of Discussions with Professor Kowalski, 11 July 1917," July 11, 1917, 155, R1501/119672, BArch.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Friedrich Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1917), 3–4, 13–14, 38, 48.
[192] Friedrich Naumann, "Polnische Schwierigkeiten," *Die Hilfe*, March 1, 1917, 897.
[193] Ibid., 898.
[194] Ibid., 896; Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 5.
[195] Naumann, "Polnische Schwierigkeiten," 898.
[196] Naumann, *Was wird aus Polen?*, 1.

"ingratitude" of the Polish population.[197] Soldiers, he noted, felt angry that they were fighting to liberate Poland while the majority of the "militarily capable Polish youth remain home".[198] To German ears, Polish justifications for refusing to join the war effort sounded like prevarication.

> The oath goes so or so, if the call for entrance into the army comes from the state-council or not, that may be theoretically important, but now is no time for theories, where is the Polish army?[199]

Many in the occupation, Naumann reported, believed a reliable Polish ally would be "splendid" but argued that Poles refused to hear reason and work faithfully with the German Empire. He feared that some officials had already concluded that "it is a historical impossibility to bind Germans and Poles together".[200] After "incrementally" fulfilling Polish requests, GGW officials felt that Poles only continued to raise new demands.[201] Polish "dissatisfaction" seemed only to grow in response to German accommodation.[202] Naumann warned Poles that German commitment to multinationalism was in danger, and urged them to demonstrate their support for the TRS.[203] Poles, he insisted, must realize that their best interests lay in collaboration with the German Empire, and should actively contribute to the war effort to gain Berlin's trust.[204]

To reinforce the multinationalist project, Naumann suggested mixing the devolution of most governing powers into Polish hands with more energetic assertions of German leadership in specific matters. He did believe the GGW should hand over management for many domestic affairs to the Polish administration.[205] He likewise prioritized the abolition of the administrative partition of Congress Poland.[206] This final measure, he hoped, would simultaneously seamlessly integrate the Polish army under the "supreme command" of the Kaiser.[207] Believing that Polish national radicals could "always find new conditions, that first must be fulfilled, before the army can truly count as Polish", Naumann argued that voluntary enlistment would never fill the ranks of the Polish army.[208] He therefore suggested that, after consolidating the Polish state, Berlin pressure Warsaw to introduce conscription both to compel Polish participation in the war effort.[209]

Skeptics of multinational imperialism continued to derogate plans for a German-Polish union in light of recent experiences. On 8 March the *Ostmarkenverein* circulated yet another memorandum in government circles, arguing that the recruitment crisis demonstrated that Poles were obviously hostile to German interests, and likely plotted to betray Berlin at the first opportunity, in order to seize Prussian territory.[210] Polish "insubordination", they claimed, had grown dramatically since November 1916 and "without a doubt" the majority of the population supported parties which absolutely rejected the attachment of Poland to the Central Powers.[211]

The *Ostmarkenverein* called upon Berlin to abandon accommodation and introduce disciplinary policies to safeguard the German Empire from Poland's likely betrayal. Having declared a Polish state, the group believed Germany was more or less stuck with it. The organization therefore sanctioned Berlin's continued efforts to firmly bind an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty.[212] However the *Ostmarkenverein* renewed calls for annexations

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[197] Ibid., 5.
[198] Ibid., 7.
[199] Ibid., 8.
[200] Ibid., 15.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., 6.
[204] Ibid., 16.
[205] Ibid., 31.
[206] Ibid., 52.
[207] Ibid., 36.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ostmarkenverein, "Denkschrift zur Errichtung des polnischen Staates," March 8, 1917, 10, N30/36, BArch.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., 11.

along the German border, secured by German colonists, to defend Prussia from Polish attack.[213] The organizational also demanded the GGW cease its efforts to build a Polish army, as Warsaw might deploy the army against the German Empire, either in offensive operations or to blackmail Berlin.[214] Berlin's interest, they argued, lay in a weak, rather than a strong, Polish state.[215]

In Warsaw, negotiations between the GGW and Polish government over the Polish army continued to frustrate both parties. The occupation relentlessly pressed the new TRS to issue an appeal for enlistment into the Polish army.[216] But Polish authorities angered the occupation in February 1917 when they provocatively adopted Piłsudski's proposal for Warsaw to directly raise its own army through the Polish legions, without the oversight of German officers.[217] Beseler refused to hand over sole authority of the Polish army to the TRS, while the council, for its part, refused to publish a new appeal for recruits until he did.[218] In March, Beseler issued a new appeal for enlistment without the imprimatur of the TRS, to predictably poor effect.[219] The TRS was incensed, and on 19 March the council threatened to resign.[220] On 6 April the Polish government published a statement of protest against the German occupation. Claiming that the GGW had broken its promises, they demanded the immediate creation of a Polish government, the turnover of responsibility for education, and territorial concessions in Lithuania.[221]

When Kaiser Karl formally turned over command of the Polish Legions to the GGWon 10 April.[222] Beseler believed that he was close to an agreement with the TRS on recruitment.[223] On 13 April he concluded that, after clarifying the legal position of the Polish Legions, he could finally expect rapid progress in negotiations with the TRS over the recruitment and formation of the Polish army.[224] On 24 April Beseler could claim some progress, as the TRS finally approved the text of the "Two-Kaiser Oath". They awaited only Berlin's final approval to move forward.[225]

This glacial progress only reinforced doubts about multinational imperialism within the German government. Even Beseler showed growing frustration with new Polish authorities. His 13 April report to the Kaiser reaffirmed his commitment to the creation of a German-Polish union as Germany's best strategic option in the region.[226] He likewise reassured the Kaiser that the "general situation" remained favorable for securing Polish acceptance of German leadership. Indeed, he remained confident enough that he again recommended awarding territories in White Ruthenia and Vilna to the Kingdom of Poland.[227] Still, Beseler's patience had been tested, and he voiced frustration with the TRS's unwillingness to publish a new appeal for recruits.[228] He sarcastically quipped that he would be optimistic, were it not for unusual talent of the Polish people for finding novel ways to obstruct or even derail "state-building work".[229] After attempting to accommodate Polish demands, Beseler now laid responsibility for any further difficulties in military matters on Polish shoulders.[230] He also tried to lower Berlin's expectations, explaining that he could only hope to train the small kernel of a future Polish army. Berlin should expect no sizeable Polish units marching to the front. Tellingly, Beseler now considered this a good thing, as the German Empire could not risk mustering a large, potentially unreliable, army behind the

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[213] Ibid., 10–11.
[214] Ibid., 11–12.
[215] Ibid., 12.
[216] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 92.
[217] Ibid., 93.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 59–60.
[222] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 93.
[223] Ibid.; von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 12 April 1917," 113.
[224] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 138.
[225] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report to the Foreign Office, 24 April 1917," April 24, 1917, 116, N30/14, BArch.
[226] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 137–41.
[227] Ibid., 141.
[228] Ibid., 138.
[229] Ibid., 138–39.
[230] Ibid., 140.

eastern Front.[231] Though still hopeful of an eventual German-Polish union, Beseler now approached the issue more cautiously, not wanting to expose Germany to unnecessary danger if his assessment of Polish opinion proved incorrect.

Beseler was among the more optimistic in his administration. His Chief of Administration had developed severe reservations about Polish policy since November. In a personal letter to Beseler in April 1917, Kries urged Beseler to reconsider the GGW's political objectives and tactics, given that the "development of political conditions in the Government General has… not taken a pleasing course".[232] Honest appraisal of the Polish press, Kries believed, demonstrated that Poles were losing interest in collaboration with the German Empire.[233] He worried that, rather actually predominantly seeking German patronage after the February Revolution, conservative Russophiles had largely joined the pro-independence or Austrophile movements.[234] The TRS, which the GGW had hoped would satisfy Polish demands and redirect public sentiment, had proved apparently incapable of governing the "easily excitable" Polish population, and was publicly scorned for its weak resistance to the occupation.[235] Kries still considered the multinational project Berlin's best option, and believed it could be salvaged if the Austro-Polish solution were decisively and publicly abandoned.[236] Still, Kries argued, public sentiment in Warsaw raised doubts as to whether "it is at all possible" to achieve a stable German-Polish union.[237] He encouraged Beseler "to prepare for other eventualities".[238]

The OHL continued to support the general program of establishing an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty. But, led by the skeptical Hindenburg, military representatives pressed hard for measures to contain the Polish state, especially by blocking the expansion of the new kingdom eastward. On 31 March representatives of the OHL and Ober Ost conferred and again recommended a second belt of Germanized annexations to the east of Poland, in order to better contain the new kingdom.[239] In a 16 April letter to Beseler, Hindenburg argued that German security demanded efforts to "surround Poland", and that Poland's common border with Russia should be "as narrow as possible".[240] In a sharp move away from visions of a collaborative and friendly German-Polish union, Hindenburg described dominating a weak and isolated Polish state by raw threat of force. He pointedly disagreed with Beseler's suggestion to transfer the governorate of Vilna to Poland as "militarily impossible".[241] Four days later, Hindenburg managed to convince the Kaiser of the inadvisability of appending Vilna, Kovno, and Grodno to the new Polish state.[242] This, however, proved a momentary victory for Hindenburg.

In a 23 April 1917 conference, Bethmann Hollweg again tried to coordinate a coherent imperial policy towards the Kingdom of Poland.[243] Participants included the Chancellor, Zimmerman, Hindenburg, and Ludendorff. The conference ultimately confirmed Germany's decision to create a large and militarily capable Polish state under German suzerainty, and even walked back the OHL's plans to surround and cripple the Kingdom of Poland. Yet the discussion simultaneously revealed growing frustration among German policy-makers with multinational imperialism after months of friction in the GGW. Military leaders openly questioned if a Kingdom of Poland could be trusted to secure Germany's Eastern frontier, and suggested pondering alternative models for reorganizing Eastern Europe. The OHL demanded larger annexations along Prussia's eastern frontier to fortify the German Empire in the event of Polish

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[231] Ibid.
[232] Wolfgang von Kries, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler Regarding the Political Situation in the GGW, 24 April 1917," April 24, 1917, 245, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[233] Ibid., 249.
[234] Ibid., 247.
[235] Ibid., 250–51.
[236] Ibid., 254.
[237] Ibid., 246.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 278–79.
[240] Paul von Hindenburg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 16 April 1917," April 16, 1917, 22, N30/11, BArch.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 347.
[243] Ibid.

defection. They now believed that German security required supplementing the Narew line with annexations along the Ostrołęka – Mława line. From Poland's western border, Germany would minimally demand additional territory around Thorn, Kalisz, and Upper Silesia. In principle, Berlin was to "strive for" Germanization of these annexations in peace negotiation, though the means, scale, and timeframe of Germanization were not explicitly set.[244] The Chancellery mollified the OHL by allowing that the final course of the German-Polish border would be "dependent on the future relationship of Poland to the German Empire".[245] "If we succeed in securing our predominance in Poland, militarily", the parties agreed, "the OHL can partially desist in its hitherto demanded border-line".[246]

By provisionally adopting new territorial demands along Poland's western border, the Chancellor appeased skeptics in the OHL and reined in their most provocative demands. Bethmann Hollweg, convinced that Germany could eventually secure the reliable collaboration of a Polish state, successfully defended Berlin's continued pursuit of a German-Polish union. He even secured the support of the OHL and Foreign Office to expand Poland's border eastward into Russia.[247] If the recent experiences had supplied the OHL with new arguments to press for the isolation of Poland, the Chancellery and Foreign Office remained confident enough in the solidity of a future German-Polish union to override their concerns. As of April 1917, Berlin was still committed to multinational imperialism in Poland. Indeed, Berlin and Warsaw to invest in the creation of a strong Polish state under German suzerainty through the spring of 1917. On 28 April, the RAI signaled Berlin's intention to expand the Kingdom of Poland into White Ruthenia by indicating that the territory south of a line running from Grodno to Vilnius "should be administered in accordance with the praxis of the Government General of Warsaw", and not the ethnic policies of Ober Ost.[248]

New Polish demands in May 1917 frustrated German authorities, but did not break Berlin's commitment to multinational imperialism. Under pressure to show progress in state-building, on 1 May TRS presented an ultimatum to Beseler, threatening to dissolve itself if the GGW failed to name a Regent and "authorized" the organization of Polish state ministries.[249] The TRS also made clear that it could not accept a formulation of the Polish Service oath which specified loyalty to the German Kaiser.[250] The same day, Beseler personally wrote a lengthy report to the Chancellor. The report opened with the Governor General venting his frustration with the Polish population and government for demanding immediate administrative autonomy despite their utter lack of trained bureaucratic personnel.[251] Far from the reasonable negotiations with moderate notables he had envisioned, Beseler complained that the proclamation of 5 November had "awakened expectations and hopes" which the "indiscriminate and demanding Poles" would not accept were "temporarily unrealizable".[252]

Still, Beseler saw the petition as an opportunity and recommended "a certain accommodation and indulgence" of at least some of the TRS demands in pursuit of "our original goals".[253] Beseler suggested installing a regent.[254] While satisfying Polish demands, installing a German prince as regent of Poland could ensure the smooth and complete integration of the Polish military into a German imperial system.[255] Establishing a regency would go a long way in earning Polish trust in the German Empire, and facilitating their eventual acceptance of suzerainty. If popular enough, a German regent might even prejudice the final selection of a

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[244] Chancellery, "Record of Cabinet Conference on War Aims, 23 April 1917," April 23, 1917, 11, R43/2477, BArch.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Theodor Lewald, "Letter to von Pourtales (Foreign Office), 28 April 1917," April 28, 1917, 58, N2176/58, BArch.
[249] Civil Administration of the GGW, "Report from Warsaw," May 1917, 6, R1501/119791, BArch.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 1 May 1917," May 1, 1917, 141, N30/14, BArch.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid., 143.
[255] Ibid., 143–44.

monarchy. Once installed, Beseler hoped, the regency would guide a Polish constitutional assembly in drafting articles to binding the Kingdom of Poland in "indissoluble alliance" with the German Empire and formally transferring responsibility for foreign policy and wartime military command to Berlin.[256] Beseler again urged the Chancellor to install a Catholic prince from a German royal dynasty as regent, and authorize him to organize a full complement of Polish ministries and even nominate a Polish chancellor.[257] He now preferred Duke Albrecht Eugen von Württemberg.[258]

Frictions in Poland, however, had by this point exhausted even Bethmann Hollweg's patience, and a regency struck him as an unwarranted indulgence of an uncooperative occupied population. On 9 May he responded to Beseler's response. From Bethmann Hollweg's perspective, the Poles had mounted new demands for months, with the TRS providing nothing in return. The Chancellor suspected that Beseler was being taken advantage of. He accused the TRS of deliberately exaggerating political discontent in Poland, using the "specter" of popular revolution, and the threat of their own resignation, to demand "wide-ranging concessions" from Berlin, at no cost to themselves.[259] The Chancellor also cited Ludendorff's concern that installing a regency might upset peace overtures to Petrograd.[260] Convinced that indulgence would prompt only further demands, Bethmann Hollweg did not "consider it desirable" to establish a regency or authorize the formation of ministries.[261] "The Poles should resign themselves to the fact that they have no claim to self-governance under international law as residents of an occupied land", and from this position of humility, instead work to accommodate the German Empire.[262] He later suggested, that the TRS might accelerate the installation of a regent by, for instance, organizing the skeleton of a government, drafting a constitution acceptable to Berlin, and establishing a treaty relationship with the German Empire.[263] For now, Bethmann Hollweg recommended the GGW invest their resources in influencing the Polish army and quietly reinforcing the popular legitimacy of the TRS by making small concessions.[264] In particular, he supported gradually transferring authority over education, justice, and domestic welfare, to the TRS.[265] The Chancellor effectively called the Poles' bluff, noting that the potential resignation of the TRS would constitute a setback for Germany, but warned that Poland would bear most of the consequences.[266]

Beseler considered this strategy counter-productive. On 24 May Beseler urgently requested the chancellor reconsider, warning that denying a TRS would cause the "deepest disappointment" and "most likely" promulgate their resignation, making the continued development of a friendly Polish state almost impossible.[267] For the sake of progress and stability, he again begged Bethmann Hollweg to immediately promise a regency and authorize Beseler to work with the TRS to begin drafting a Polish constitution and organizing Polish ministries.[268]

But opinion among Beseler's subordinates over how to project influence over Poland began to split in the spring of 1917. Lerchenfeld sided with Beseler's more generous tact, and supported the immediate selection of a regent.[269] Only by investing the TRS with greater authority and responsibility, he believed, could Germany overcome Polish nationalists' justifiable

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[256] Ibid., 144–45.
[257] Ibid., 144.
[258] Ibid., 145–47.
[259] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 9 May 1917," May 9, 1917, 162, N30/14, BArch.
[260] Ibid., 163.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 23 May 1917," May 23, 1917, 166–67, N30/14, BArch.
[264] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 9 May 1917," 163.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 24 May 1917," May 24, 1917, 170, N30/14, BArch.
[268] Ibid., 171.
[269] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Memorandum on Reforming to the Provisional Council of State," June 10, 1917, 23, R1501/119712, BArch.

"impatience" over state-building efforts.[270] He proposed splitting the TRS in two, and organizing a parliament and a government around the respective halves.[271] Elections would fill the ranks of the new parliament, and reinforce its legitimacy as it began drafting a Polish constitution.[272] A German-appointed "commissioner" would continue to oversee Poland's new administration but would gradually allow the bureaucracy to take control of a growing list of responsibilities.[273]

Conversely, Kries had become more reticent, and now tried to stall the transfer of authority until Warsaw had demonstrated its willingness to work in the interests of the German Empire. Autonomous Polish ministries, Kries feared, might craft policies contrary to the needs of the occupying powers.[274] On 14 June Kries insisted to Beseler that the only "practical way to build a Polish state" was to proceed with a policy of "gradual penetration". He wanted to continue training and incorporating Polish bureaucrats into existing German-controlled administrative structures in order to develop a bureaucratic core that was both competently trained and habituated to collaboration with the German Empire.[275] Kries disagreed with Lerchenfeld's proposals to furnish Poland with a nascent executive and constituent assembly.[276] He had little to no confidence in the popularity of the German Empire among the residents of Congress Poland, and by now he doubted the ability of German-friendly elites to persuade any significant number of their countrymen in the near future. Far from reinforcing the legitimacy of a compliant Polish government, Kries feared that elections would eject the "most useful and reliable" collaborators from the positions of authority.[277] Rather than empower the TRS, Kries recommended chastening Polish nationalists by publicly clarifying the limited nature of the council's mandate.[278]

Mutius supported a compromise. On 24 June 1917, he pressed Bethmann Hollweg to accept plans to establish at least a regency council for the Kingdom of Poland. Local political elites had reassured him that monarchical and conservative factions in the Kingdom of Poland had united around this demand, and convinced him that a regency council would cooperate readily with the GGW.[279] The proposal for a regency council represented a compromise solution between a true regency and the status quo. A regency council would have authority to name Polish ministers, but possess little real independent executive power.[280] But Mutius believed Polish assurances that even this progress towards a skeletal Polish administration would calm popular disquiet in the country and consolidate Poland's various monarchical parties into a more cohesive pro-government block.[281] A regency council therefore seemed a moderate step to continue scaffolding a Polish government without compromising the GGW's immediate control. Mutius's appeal convinced the Chancellor and on 28 June he signaled his provisional agreement with this plan.[282]

A new reform proposal submitted by the TRS on 3 July 1917 accelerated the timetable for consideration of a regency council. The TRS essentially requested authorization from the GGW to form a constitutional monarchy roughly on the model of the German Empire.[283] Until the nomination of a king, the TRS asked for government authority to be vested in a three-man

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[270] Ibid., 25.
[271] Ibid., 26–27.
[272] Ibid., 24–29.
[273] Ibid., 26–27, 35.
[274] Wolfgang von Kries, "Erklärung der verbündeten Regierungen an den Provisorischen Staatsrat vom 8. Juni 1917," June 14, 1917, 16–17, 20, R1501/119712, BArch.
[275] Ibid., 16.
[276] Ibid., 18–19.
[277] Ibid., 19.
[278] Ibid., 21.
[279] Gerhard von Mutius, "Memorandum Regarding a Possible Regency Council, 24 June 1917," June 24, 1917, 3, R1501/119712, BArch.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid., 3–4.
[282] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "Note to the Imperial Office of the Interior, 28 June 1917," June 28, 1917, 2, R1501/119712, BArch.
[283] Provisional Council of State, "Secondary Recommendations for Poland's Supreme State Authorities," July 3, 1917, 37–38, R1501/119712, BArch.

regency council with the authority to ratify laws and treaties.[284] The council would select a Minister-president[·], who would in turn select a cabinet of government ministers[285] The Minister-president's first task would be to organize Polish ministries of finance, justice, education, culture, economics, and the interior. The Polish state, the TRS proposed, would soon assume jurisdiction over each of these competences. Finally, the regency council would expand the TRS, nominating 25 new members to form a provisional assembly to both advise the GGW and begin drafting a new constitution.[286] To balance these far-reaching demands, the TRS gestured towards German ambitions for suzerainty. A temporary Polish political department, for instance, would prepare and negotiate treaties and agreements governing Warsaw's relationship with the Central Powers.[287] The TRS thereby sought to strike a balance between cultivating the popular legitimacy of the new Polish state through expanded self-governance, while quietly reassuring Berlin of its continued ability to influence Warsaw and secure the political and military treaties Germany considered necessary. The TRS offered Berlin a subtle assurance of their ongoing cooperation by proposing to subject the transfer of authority for each ministerial portfolio to final approval by the GGW.[288]

The assembled leaders of the GGW considered this proposal on 6 July. Beseler and Kries both agreed that a regency council was a bad idea, and "resolutely" opposed the 3 July reform proposal.[289] Though supportive of a [German] regent as a new, more legitimate, channel for Berlin's influence on the formation of a Polish state, both worried that a native regency council would contradict occupation policy's and might even make constitutional decisions contrary to Berlin's plans.[290] Beseler and Kries considered the next phase of state-building critical, and insisted that Berlin needed to be able to rely upon a Polish executive to both "combat" nationalist independence movements and to ratify German suzerainty.[291] While recognizing the necessity of granting more "authority" to the Polish state, Kries and Beseler now broadly doubted the reliability of the Polish political elites, whether in their sympathies or their ability to influence mass political sentiment. They therefore also believed that the reform and expansion of the TRS would have unpredictable consequences. The GGW could not risk the election of a "majority that pursued a direction hostile to the Central Powers".[292] Beseler and Kries therefore suggested a more limited counter-proposal, officially scheduling the transfer of all administrative responsibilities, with the exception of war-economy and security, into Polish hands by April 1918.[293] Lerchenfeld dissented. Like Mutius he supported a regency council as a positive symbolic gesture. He also believed that installing the staunchly monarchical Archbishop Kakowski, as a member of the council, would surely support German interests.[294]

Efforts to establish the basic structures of the new Polish state in early 1917 quietly eroded German policy-makers' trust in the willingness or ability of the Polish government to reliably serve the German Empire in the long term. Distrustful of Berlin, Polish leaders naturally wanted wide-ranging assurances for the future autonomy of the new state before they assented to German demands, and many surely desired a more authentic sovereignty than Berlin was willing to offer. The TRS sought the immediate confirmation of its own autonomy and competence to preserve their own embattled popular legitimacy. Already insecure about the prospects for a German-Polish collaboration and wary of Polish motives, German policy-makers were inclined

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[284] Ibid., 38.

[·] Presumably this responsibility would later fall to the King.

[285] Provisional Council of State, "Secondary Recommendations for Poland's Supreme State Authorities," 38.

[286] Ibid., 38–41.

[287] Provisional Council of State, "Primary Recommendations for Poland's Supreme State Authorities," July 3, 1917, 50, R1501/119712, BArch.

[288] Ibid., 55.

[289] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Analysis of the Provisional Council of State's Recommendations for Poland's Supreme State Authorities," July 12, 1917, 76, R1501/119712, BArch.

[290] Ibid., 76–79.

[291] Ibid., 76.

[292] Ibid., 77–80.

[293] Ibid., 78.

[294] Ibid., 79–80.

to read Warsaw's demands for further autonomy, and its reluctance to enthusiastically back the German war effort, as signals of disloyalty. The ponderous bilateral negotiations between Berlin and Vienna needed to ratify any major political decisions regarding the Kingdom of Poland further prevented German authorities from addressing discontent before it grew more serious.

Political friction wore at away at the patience of German policy-makers in the spring of 1917, but did not yet fundamentally challenge the credibility of multinational imperialism. The establishment of an autonomous Polish state in union with the German Empire remained the undisputed ambition of German policy-makers. Both the GGW and Berlin continued to invest in diplomatic efforts to secure Austria-Hungary's public divestment from Congress Poland. Indeed, Berlin initially considered competing Viennese influence far more dangerous than Polish nationalism, and therefore prioritized the expulsion of Austria-Hungary from Congress Poland above the territorial fortification of Germany's border with Poland. In a 16 March conference with Austro-Hungarian representatives, Bethmann Hollweg offered to claim no annexations in Congress Poland if Vienna backed German efforts to establish unilateral suzerainty over the new kingdom.[295] In a subsequent meeting with Czernin on 27 March, Bethmann Hollweg agreed to prioritize Austro-Hungarian interests in the postwar settlement with Romania in exchange for control over Congress Poland.[296] Austria-Hungary confirmed that it would "leave Germany a free hand in Poland" both politically and militarily in a 17-18 May conference at Kreuznach.[297] On 8 June, Germany and Austria-Hungary again ratified German Empire's exclusive hegemony over Poland.[298] However, to the Chancellery's mounting frustration, Austro-Hungarian negotiators proved reluctant to actually meet Germany's repeated demands to dismantle the GGL and evacuate Congress Poland.[299]

Friction between the GGW and Polish political elites continued to sow doubt about multinational imperialism among observers in the German public. Friedrich Naumann was exemplary of the embattled position of multinationalist proponents. His buoyant optimism of 1915 and 1916 had, by early 1917, soured into a beleaguered but stubborn insistence that integrating Poland into a Central European confederation represented the only plausible strategy for achieving lasting security for the German Empire. In a 4 May speech before the Reichstag, Naumann conceded that the political situation in Poland appeared ominous and that one might easily doubt that Germany could achieve Poland's stable integration into a multinational confederation.[300] But Naumann shifted blame for fraught German-Polish relations to Berlin. He accused the GGW of overburdening Poles with requisitions. Meanwhile, he argued, had failed to dismantle the GGL and introduce any subsequent political reforms that might satisfy Polish demands.[301] Despite these errors, Naumann insisted that pro-independence factions in Poland were neither hegemonic nor intractably anti-German.[302] Polish opinion, he believed, would develop to accept membership in a Central European confederation within ten to fifteen years, especially when the public witnessed the benefits of economic incorporation.[303] Warsaw would accept German leadership, Naumann maintained, because *Mitteleuropa* represented its best chance for securing its own autonomy. An autonomous Polish state as a member of *Mitteleuropa*, he believed, still represented the only plausible means for bring Germany's "eastern border into order".[304] Naumann therefore called for patience, reform, and new concessions to repair Germany's relationship with the Polish government. Like Lerchenfeld, he supported the

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[295] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 343–44.
[296] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg and Ottokar Czernin, "Provisional Agreement on German and Austro-Hungarian Plans for Eastern Europe, 27 March 1917," March 27, 1917, 10, R43/2477, BArch.
[297] Reichskanzlei, "Allgemeine Aufzeichnung Über Die Polnische Frage," 1917, 2, R43/2477, BArch; Chancellery, "Results of the Kreuznach Conference, 17-18 May 1917," May 18, 1917, 9, R43/2477, BArch.
[298] Chancellery, "Results of the Kreuznach Conference, 17-18 May 1917," 9.
[299] Reichskanzlei, "Allgemeine Aufzeichnung Über Die Polnische Frage," 1–3.
[300] Friedrich Naumann, "Transcript of Speech before Given to the Reichstag, 4 May 1917," May 4, 1917, 21–22, R1501/119672, BArch.
[301] Ibid., 22.
[302] Ibid., 23.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid., 24.

expansion of the TRS into a provisional executive body and authorizing the creation of Polish ministries.[305]

Wilhelm von Massow and Max Seber similarly continued to defend the extension of German suzerainty over an autonomous Poland against the "many political circles" who, they admitted, denounced German policy in Poland as "completely muddled" or "lost".[306] Both called on Germans to commit more faithfully to the project. Seber, for instance, blamed the unwillingness of German nationalists to surrender counter-productive homogenization policies in Prussia for preventing an "advantageous relationship with the Kingdom of Poland" and obstructing Berlin's broader "supranational purposes".[307] The German public, Massow complained, had harbored "unjustified expectations" for enthusiastic Polish collaboration which, he observed, had produced a self-sabotaging impatience.[308] Now that Warsaw was not meeting their wildly optimistic hopes, he feared that conservative circles, which had only tenuously supported multinational union in 1916, would now abandon the project.[309] Convinced that Polish distrust of Berlin was surmountable, Massow begged his readers to continue supporting the military and political union of the German Empire with an autonomous Polish state.[310] Yet Massow also sympathized with German anxieties, and called on the TRS to accept "alliance with us" without "hesitation" to earn German trust and secure their own national goals.[311]

Political frictions in Warsaw and the demands of some Polish nationalists for Prussian territory provisioned skeptics of multinationalism with ample ammunition to denounce a German-Polish union as naïve and irresponsible. On 28 May an assembly of Polish politicians in Kraków had publicly demanded an independent Polish state with access to the sea. One article in *Berliner neueste Nachrichten* understandably read this as a claim to Prussian territory along the Vistula, and denounced the assembly for addressing their appeal to the international community, including the Entente powers.[312] How, the author wondered, could Germany support the creation of a Polish army in the face of such obvious treachery.[313] He castigated known multinationalists in the GGW like Mutius and Lerchenfeld for their recklessness.[314] This was only one of a series of articles in the paper. Most attacked the foundational assumption of multinational imperialism, arguing that Poles were irreconcilably hostile to the German Empire and would invariably betray Berlin to seize Prussian territory. They denounced the formation of a Polish army as an urgent and existential threat to the German Empire.[315]

In late June the *Magdeburger Zeitung* joined them in publishing a "complete registry of the sins of the Poles", which included the aforementioned Kraków assembly on 28 May.[316] Polish political elites, the paper complained, had always found some excuse to dismiss German concessions as insufficient to earn their collaboration.[317] Now, he accused Polish activists of deliberately stalling progress toward Polish statehood until the Entente could intervene in their favor.[318] In light of Poles' evident unreliability, he called for a "fundamental revision" of Polish policy. Either territorial partition of Congress Poland, or its return to Russia, would serve German security far better than Polish national autonomy.[319]

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[305] Ibid., 23.
[306] Wilhelm von Massow, "Die Zustände in Polen," *Deutsche Politik* 2 (July 13, 1917): 889–91.
[307] Max Seber, "Zwischen Nationalistischer Und Pazifisticher Gefahr," *Deutsche Politik* 2 (June 1, 1917): 707.
[308] von Massow, "Die Zustände in Polen," 889–90.
[309] Ibid., 891.
[310] Ibid., 890, 897.
[311] Ibid., 894.
[312] Berliner Neueste Nachrichten, "Der Polenkurs, 4," June 27, 1917, 60, R1501/119791, BArch.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Berliner neueste Nachrichten, "Der Polenkurs, 1," June 7, 1917, 157, R1501/119791, BArch; Berliner neueste Nachrichten, "Der Polenkurs, 2," June 7, 1917, 157, R1501/119791, BArch; Berliner neueste Nachrichten, "Der Polenkurs, 3," June 18, 1917, 157, R1501/119791, BArch.
[316] Polnischen Blätter: Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und soziales Leben, "Die Polen auf der Anklagebank: Eine Erwiderung und Mahnung von der Redaktion der ‚Polnischen Blätter'," July 24, 1917, 87, R1501/119791, BArch.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid.

Student Strikes and Local Conflicts in the GGW, Summer 1917

Deteriorating relations between GGW officials and the occupied population of Congress Poland only compounded German frustrations with stalled political development. The most high-profile confrontation occurred when demonstrations in Warsaw associated with the May 3Rd Constitution Day turned rowdy. When police arrested two students of the university, Students of the university were outraged, and organized a broad strike to demand their release.[320] Officials refused to meet their demands, and unrest intensified as groups of students took to the streets and began clashing with police.[321] Demonstrations soon became so intense that the military governor of Warsaw warned city notables that the occupation was preparing to employ the "sharpest means" to suppress the students and restore order, and could not be held responsible if some of the demonstrators were harmed.[322] The GGW attempted to prevent violence by temporarily shuttering the Polytechnic and convincing the faculty of Warsaw University to plead with the students to end the strike.[323] The university students, however, refused to return to class and instead expanded their demands to include complete autonomy for the university.[324] Hutten-Czapski, convinced students return to class by assuring them that plans for full academic autonomy were underway, but students now obstinately refused to pay university enrollment fees.[325] Beseler personally intervened to end the student strike, calling a meeting of senior occupation officials, school rectors, and representatives of Warsaw's private colleges on 25 May.[326] But Beseler used the opportunity to accuse university faculty of failing to maintain order in the student body, and criticize the students' intervention in expressly political matters.[327] Incensed, the gathered faculty representatives countered that student protests merely reflected frustration with Germany's failure to realize the promises of 5 November 1916.[328] When students continued to refuse to pay their enrollment fees, occupation officials finally closed the university, expelling those who had failed to pay.[329]

In the German public, nationalist commentators mocked the student strike as yet another manifestation of Poles' intractable and irrational hostility. One article in the *Berliner neueste Nachrichten* painted the GGW's handling of the unrest as a synecdoche for German occupation policy and its "false pliability", which only emboldened further Polish national resistance.[330] The article blamed occupation officials for attempting to negotiate with students, rather than immediately closing the university and technical college. The GGW's measured response, the author argued, had evinced a lack of German resolve, encouraging some students to articulate new demands for Polish independence, to call upon their co-nationals to ignore occupation institutions, and to refuse to pay their tuition.[331]

The student strike deeply troubled German policy-makers in Warsaw and Berlin. Reopening the University of Warsaw had been conceived as a key effort to earn Polish trust. Moreover, GGW policy had aimed to incubate a caste of future Polish administrative and technical elites both capable of leading the Kingdom of Poland, and willing to work within the parameters of German suzerainty. The student strike deeply unnerved German policy-makers because the students involved were precisely the cohorts that Berlin was hoping to cultivate and rely upon as loyalists of the German-Polish union.

Already wavering in his commitment to multinational imperialism, the student strike appears to have finally broken Kries's personal confidence in the German Empire's ability to

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[320] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 73; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 185–86.
[321] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 73; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 185–86.
[322] Ulrich von Etzdorf, "Letter to Stadtpräsident Lubomirski, 14 May 1917," May 14, 1917, 25, N30/23, BArch.
[323] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 73.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Ibid., 73–74.
[327] Ibid., 74; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 187.
[328] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 187.
[329] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 74.
[330] Berliner Neueste Nachrichten, "Der Polenkurs, 4," 60.
[331] Romberg, "Consular Report from Bern, 26 June 1917," June 26, 1917, 61, R1501/119791, BArch.

construct a reliable Polish satellite state. By May Beseler's Chief of Administration had concluded that student organizations were incubating anti-German nationalist sentiment.[332] In an 8 June 1917 report Kries informed Beseler that he was no longer convinced that Germany could create a Polish state that would reliably serve its interests.[333] He could not escape the conclusion that the Polish public had turned against the German Empire. A mixture of Austrian subversion, exorbitant requisitions, and unpopular economic policies, he believed, had all consolidated an "irreconcilable enmity against Germany" among the residents of Congress Poland.[334] He framed the university strike as only the latest of several incidents manifesting the "absolute hostility of [Polish] national sentiment towards the Germans".[335] All political interventions and attempted manipulations of popular opinion, Kries despaired, had proven ineffective or counterproductive. He concluded that it was:

> …virtually impossible to make a policy against the public sentiment [*Volksstimmung*] of the broadest circles, especially in a Nation as easily excitable as the Poles, and I for my part would like to suggest that the entire development of relations here in Poland has influenced the public sentiment so strongly and consistently to the detriment of Germany that the achievement of the goals pursued by the German side with the proclamation of 5 November 1916 is no longer possible".[336]

To Kries, it no longer mattered if Germany could recruit the collaboration of Polish political, social, and intellectual elites. These, he believed, no longer had the influence to mold Polish national sentiment enough to bring it into alignment with German imperial interests. The Polish masses did not trust the German Empire and would not suffer German suzerainty, and no Polish government, no matter how sympathetic, could alter this condition. In contrast to 1916, Kries now worried about the possibility of organized resistance to the German occupation. In the same report he warned of the growing influence of the POW.[337]

Kries therefore advised the Governor General to abandon the aim of "attaching Poland to Germany".[338] He instead suggested releasing most of Congress-Poland to Austria-Hungary, in exchange for concessions elsewhere.[339] Kries expected that returning to an Austro-Polish framework would entail larger annexations of Polish territory to secure Germany's eastern frontier. He therefore recommended the GGW immediately begin organizing special military administrations to "prepare" these regions for eventual annexation to Prussia.[340]

The Chief of Administration expressed his hope that future developments might prove him wrong, and that Polish national sentiment might indeed be pliable.[341] He also assured Beseler that he would continue to fulfill his duties and support the Governor General's policies. However, Kries warned that if Beseler ever hoped to achieve a stable German-Polish union, Germany needed to both drastically improve the economic situation in occupied Poland and immediately make clear to Polish observers that the Austro-Polish solution was dead.[342]

As faculty and city notables proved either unwilling or unable to dragoon students back into classrooms, occupation officials continued to lose faith in Berlin's ability to influence Polish national politics through trusted elites. Ulrich von Etzdorf, Beseler's military governor of Warsaw, scorned the apparent apathy of Warsaw's political and spiritual elites, reporting that

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[332] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 185.
[333] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report to Governor General von Beseler on the Political Situation in the GGW, 8 June 1917," June 8, 1917, 270, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[334] Ibid., 283.
[335] Ibid., 284.
[336] Ibid., 283.
[337] Ibid., 284.
[338] Ibid., 283–86.
[339] Ibid., 286.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid., 283–85.
[342] Ibid.

they simply refused to apply their influence to assist the occupation. He considered the "insubordination" of the striking students typical of Polish ingratitude to the GGW's generosity.[343] He blamed Lubomirski, at the time the city president of Warsaw, for failing to energetically restrain or denounce the protests.[344] Etzdorf similarly reported that Archbishop Kakowski had declined to involve himself in politics or back Germany's position. Etzdorf was left to wonder why Kakowski refused to intervene, given the Archbishop's known monarchism, and his concerns about rising republican sentiment in Poland.[345]

The Warsaw University student strike represented only the most visible clash between occupation personnel and the residents of Congress Poland. Local confrontations between German occupiers and Poles had flared since the 5th November 1916, further eroding the occupiers faith in the willingness of Poles to collaborate with the German Empire. Poles certainly had legitimate complaints. The heavy burden of military requisitions generated much civilian hostility towards the occupation. GGW regulations stipulated that Polish legionnaires and military personnel salute German officers, but did not require salutes for Polish officers from German enlisted men. Sympathetic Poles warned the GGW that this lack of reciprocity was deeply.[346] Abuses by local officials further undermined the occupation's efforts to build trust among the Polish population. Even German officials worried that the behavior of some non-commissioned officers and local bureaucrats resembled "tropical-rage" [*Tropenkoller*], a fictitious nervous condition thought to afflict officials and soldiers stationed in colonies, characterized by a reduction in impulse control, paranoia, and exaggerated violence or even cruelty towards natives.[347] Fastidious personnel across the GGW complained that some of their colleagues made it their mission to demonstrate their superiority to the "Polish riff-raff", acting as if they were "conquerors and unlimited lords".[348] Additionally, Ober Ost's vicious exploitation of local resources, its rumored treatment of local peasants as "slaves", and its reported chronic disrespect for the local Roman Catholic Church together produced what the Foreign Office described as a "tremendous bitterness" in Congress Poland.[349] Poles who sympathized with German imperial aims warned that, if substantial reforms did not address abuse and mismanagement in Ober Ost, the GGW would risk permanently alienating the majority of Poles.

Regardless of the legitimacy of civilian grievances, German occupation personnel increasingly complained of insubordination and even outright hostility from local Poles. To many officers and civilian administrators, the declaration of Polish statehood, in combination with subsequent statebuilding efforts, seemed to have emboldened and empowered local resistance, rather than inspiring popular gratitude or collaboration with the German Empire. Occupation personnel particularly despised former members of the Polish legion, who, by the spring of 1917, formed the core of Poland's national army. Complaints of the legionnaires' "insolent and defiant" behavior towards occupation personnel were ubiquitous.[350] Rather than working with the occupation to achieve mutual goals, Legionnaires seemed to be using their new official status to organize local resistance against the occupation. Warsaw received a slew of reports in the summer of 1917 of legionnaires inciting villages to refuse GGW authority, particularly in regards to requisitions.[351] German *Kreischef*s describe legionnaires' "ostentations

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[343] von Etzdorf, "Letter to Stadtpräsident Lubomirski, 14 May 1917," 25.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, "Report to the GGW on His Conversation with Archbishop Kakowski, 14 May 1917," May 14, 1917, 26, N30/23, BArch.
[346] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Record of Prince Lubecki's Report to the GGW, 10 July 1917," July 10, 1917, 60, R1501/119712, BArch.
[347] Dr. Erwin Steinitzer, "Bericht über eine Studienreise im Generalgouvernement Warschau, 2. Bis 15. Juni 1917," June 15, 1917, 348, R1501/119781, BArch; Eva Bischoff, "Tropenkoller: Male Self-Control and the Loss of Colonial Rule," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear, and Radicalization*, ed. Gregor Thum and Maurus Reinkowski (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 117–23.
[348] Steinitzer, "Bericht über eine Studienreise im Generalgouvernement Warschau, 2. Bis 15. Juni 1917," 348.
[349] Foreign Office, "Memorandum Submitted to the RAI, 6 August 1918," August 6, 1918, 70–71, R1501/119782, BArch.
[350] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Record of Prince Lubecki's Report to the GGW, 10 July 1917," 60.
[351] Also noted in Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 100.

anti-German" efforts to prevent gendarmes and soldiers from requisitioning goods in the country-side.[352] In one particularly galling incident, a German reservist had discovered two cows illegally stashed in the fortress, and attempted to requisition them. When he arrived in the local village, the reservist had been detained by twenty legionnaires, dressed down by their commanding officer, and ordered to return the cows.[353] A German officer had eventually secured the reservist's release, but the two returned to their quarters without the cattle, and were shadowed by armed legionnaires for several kilometers.[354] German personnel complained that such incidents injured the credibility of the occupation among Poles.

Clashes between Legionnaires and occupation personnel sometimes involved more explicitly political grievances. In one incident, a German gendarme had been threatened by a group of five legionnaires in a market in Konin. Polish and German accounts of the incident conflicted, but the gendarme reported being menaced by legionnaires brandishing "drawn knives" who, upon discovering he was German, struck him in the face and shouted that "we fight for our fatherland". According to German reports the assailants also seized the gendarme's carbine and sabre, before German reinforcements arrived and arrested four of the legionnaires.[355] To German officials, reports of such incidents already showed disconcerting signs that the emerging Polish army actually despised their German counterparts, considering them enemies to expel rather than partners in a joint security-order.

The efforts of GGW officials to resolve the incident with Polish officers only seemed to confirm the impression that the Polish army regarded the German Empire as an enemy. When the German mayor of Konin confronted the local Polish commander regarding the molestation of his personnel, the officer essentially ignored the episode and instead insisted that wide-ranging political concessions would be a precondition for reducing friction between Polish and German personnel. He retorted that the legionnaires in question were frustrated with the slow pace of state-building and infuriated by Germany's undelivered promises.[356] The officer then insisted that the GGW install a Polish regent, "to whom we want to take our oath of allegiance". Once installed a Polish regent could "conclude treaties with Kaiser Wilhelm as he saw fit. But we can and will never swear an oath to Kaiser Wilhelm".[357] The officer further warned that "great discontent reigned" in the countryside and that "above all something must soon happen on the part of the German government, otherwise he [the officer] could guarantee nothing".[358] Having received such a thinly veiled threat, the mayor reported to Warsaw his own impression that the population of Congress Poland would never accept German suzerainty. He further suspected that Polish Legionnaires were covertly printing their own subversive periodical.[359] Local incidents of unrest produced an unnerving effect across the occupation.[360] Warsaw attended carefully to reports from Konin, and both Kries and Born-Fallois found them concerning enough to warrant passing them along to the RAI.[361]

The GGW had invested high hopes in the creation of a Polish army as a corner-stone of efforts to build trust in the German Empire. While providing Warsaw with insurance against

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[352] von Imhoff, "Report to the Verwaltungschef, Pułtusk 21 June 1917," June 21, 1917, 68, R1501/119831, BArch; von Imhoff, "Report to the Verwaltungschef, Pułtusk 15 June 1917," June 15, 1917, 69, R1501/119831, BArch.
[353] von Imhoff, "Submission of Report by Korpsgendarm Hardt to the Verwaltungschef, 21 June 1917," June 21, 1917, 72, R1501/119831, BArch.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Kreischef of Konin, "Report Submitted by the Kreischef of Konin to the Zivilverwaltung, 19 June 1917," June 19, 1917, 78–79, R1501/119831, BArch.
[356] Mayor of Konin, "Report Submitted to the Kreischef of Konin on Communications with the Local Polish Commander, 18 June 1917," June 18, 1917, 83, R1501/119831, BArch.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Kreischef of Konin, "Report Submitted by the Kreischef of Konin to the Zivilverwaltung, 19 June 1917," 79.
[361] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report to the RAI, 4 July 1917," July 4, 1917, 85, R1501/119831, BArch; Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Report to the RAI on the Behavior of the Polish Legions, 27 June 1917," June 27, 1917, 67, R1501/119831, BArch; Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Second Report to the RAI on the Behavior of the Polish Legions, 27 June 1917," June 27, 1917, 77, R1501/119831, BArch.

fears of German interference in Poland's domestic autonomy, the process of building the army was intended to simultaneously reinforce mutual trust between Germans and Poles, and a vehicle for German influence over the Polish officer caste. By the summer of 1917, however, the formation of the Polish army had begun to negatively impact German perceptions of the multinationalist project. Polish soldiers, especially legionnaires, were perceived by many as a haughty armed faction, uninterested in fighting alongside the German Empire, and threatening to the occupation's control over the region. The existence of the Polish state, rather than satisfying nationalist demands and bolstering local trust, instead appeared to embolden Poles to challenge GGW authority. Institutions of statehood, especially the army, seemed less likely to achieve Berlin's goals than to equip Poles to more effectively resist German authority. Unlike earlier efforts to build local Polish police forces, collaboration with the legions steadily wore down German officials' trust in the reliability of Polish military units.

Some concerned German Officials therefore began to suggest deterring future Polish resistance through visible reassertions of Germany's power over the occupied territory. The Kreischef of Pułtusk, for instance, recommended immediate, sweeping, though unspecific disciplinary action to humiliate nationalist agitators and restore the GGW's prestige.

> If the brash and anti-German activities of the legions, above all [those of] the officers, are not energetically and successfully counteracted, it is impossible to uphold the authority of the German occupation authorities and enforce their instructions among the population, which increasingly see the legions as protectors against the German administration.[362]

By the end of June, he complained that local relations between occupation officials and the Legion had only further deteriorated. Now, he argued, "only exemplary punishment and disciplinary transfers could still make impressions".[363]

German officials Warsaw also found it more difficult to contain labor unrest and prevent it from taking on political overtones. Recall that the GGW had managed to capably negotiate with striking city workers in May 1916, offering tactical concessions in wages and working conditions. As of July 1917, Glasenapp still carefully distinguished between labor demonstrations, which expressed economic grievances, and protests which expressed nationalist or political grievances.[364] On 7 July, however, demonstrations by workers of the Parawoz Werken in Warsaw had reached such an intensity that the limited personnel assigned to guard the factory requested reinforcements to help contain the crowds.[365] When Glasenapp's men began arresting strikers the following day, a large crowd surrounded the police and soldiers to halt the arrests.[366] German personnel reported feeling "seriously threatened" and even being "violently attacked" by the crowd.[367] One German police officer was struck in the head by a stone and carried from the street to receive treatment.[368] In response, the Germans turned their weapons on the crowd, shooting one worker dead and wounding several more.[369] From here, German accounts reported, the whole neighborhood seemed to suddenly resist occupation personnel. Polish women set upon one prisoner- transport, paused at a railway-crossing, and liberated the imprisoned workers.[370] One angered mob reportedly even erected a barricade and tore up a sewer line to block automobiles, bringing German reinforcements.[371] Responders even reported hearing

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[362] von Imhoff, "Report to the Verwaltungschef, Pułtusk 21 June 1917," 68.
[363] von Imhoff, "Report to the Verwaltungschef, Pułtusk 25 June 1917," June 25, 1917, 88, R1501/119831, BArch.
[364] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Report to the Zivilverwaltung, 4 July 1917," July 4, 1917, 1, R1501/119867a, BArch.
[365] Deutsche Polizeipräsidium Warschau, "Report to the GGW, 8 July 1917," July 8, 1917, 4, R1501/119867a, BArch.
[366] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Report to the Zivilverwaltung, 8 July 1917," July 8, 1917, 2, R1501/119867a, BArch.
[367] Ibid., 3.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Deutsche Polizeipräsidium Warschau, "Report to the GGW, 8 July 1917," 5.
[371] Ibid.

"revolutionary songs" during the upheaval. German police eventually restored order, but the riot appeared disturbingly close to a revolt

Policy-makers in Berlin also raised concerns that frictions in Congress Poland were sparking new nationalist fires in the *Ostmark*. Hermann von Stein, the Prussian Minister of War, twice forwarded a packet of reports on local conditions in Posen to Bethmann Hollweg.[372] A cover letter for the reports, complained that most Polish Prussians, seemed to view the proclamation as a step towards a future greater Polish state, which would also include Posen and West Prussia.[373]

> If it is nowhere voiced, there can yet be no doubt about it, that in reality, an irredentist movement was immediately revived in the hearts of Poles by the manifesto.[374]

This summary was followed by a series of testimonials from ethnic Germans in Posen. The uniting theme was that Poles, far from thankful or loyal to Berlin, generally nurtured an aversion or outright hostility to the German Empire.[375] Some claimed that their Polish neighbors had taken the 5 November proclamation as a sign of German weakness, and therefore now sought greater concessions.[376] Some argued that attempting to find a mutually agreeable German-Polish settlement was simply impossible. "Whoever believes in winning over the Poles through flexibility or accommodation," one report ran, "is not familiar with the Polish national character".[377] One Posener claimed:

> The German population…is overwhelmingly of the conviction, that an independent Kingdom of Poland will always be an enormous threat for Posen and West Prussia, and also probably Upper Silesia, and in the event of a new war with Russia will quite surely fight on its [Russia's] side against us, and indeed with enthusiasm.[378]

As unrest in occupied Poland simmered in early 1917, some observers voiced alarm over the domestic ramifications of Polish statehood.

Not all, however, shared this pessimism. Prussian authorities contested this bleak picture of conditions in the *Ostmark*. Eisenhardt-Rothe, for instance, argued that Corpus Christi processions on the 4 July 1917 actually demonstrated the continuing political stability and loyalty of the region.[379] Despite Endek efforts, nationalist agitation had remained comfortably marginal at the religious celebration.[380] There were, he clarified, about 40 known instances in which a white-red flag had been displayed. Even if all of these displays had been subversive or treasonous, the *Oberpräsident* assured Berlin that this represented a disappearingly small phenomenon in a city as massive as Posen, much less one with such a large Polish minority.[381] Some Endek "agitators" had tried to stoke nationalist sentiment by singing national songs like "Boże, coś Polskę". But Eisenhardt-Rothe cautioned his superiors that many who had joined in such hymns, often from rural areas, probably didn't even think of their singing in national

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[372] Deputy General Command of the V. Army Corps, "Report on the Polish-Speaking Population of Prussia, Relayed to the Chancellery by the War Ministry 20 February 1917," February 2, 1917, 133, R1501/119790, BArch; Hermann von Stein, "Submission of February Report by the Deputy General Command of the V Army Corps to the Chancellery," March 8, 1917, 193, R1501/119790, BArch.
[373] Deputy General Command of the V. Army Corps, "Report on the Polish-Speaking Population of Prussia," 135.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid., 137.
[376] Ibid., 138.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid., 137.
[379] Hans von Eisenhart-Rothe, "Report to the Prussian Interior Ministry, 4 July 1917," July 4, 1917, 80, R1501/119791, BArch.
[380] Ibid., 82.
[381] Ibid., 81.

terms.[382] Order, he reported happily, prevailed throughout the day. Eisenhardt-Rothe therefore recommended against any new measures to punish nationalist agitators. These, he argued, could only make "martyrs" of these relatively un-influential nationalists.[383]

Local incidents of unrest in the GGW deeply unnerved the Governor General. In the wake of the student strike even he worried that German ambitions for the university might have been conceptually flawed or over-ambitious.[384] In a letter to Naumann, Beseler confided that difficulties in forging a German-Polish union seemed "almost insurmountable".[385] Nonetheless, Beseler continued in his dogged insistence that the German-Polish relationship could be salvaged. On 6 June 1917, at the nadir of the student strike, Beseler even sent a new letter to Hindenburg, continuing to argue that the expansion of Poland eastward would benefit the German Empire.[386]

On 8 June 1917, the Chancellor called Beseler to Kreuznach.[387] Beseler's agenda for the meeting suggests the Governor General knew that Bethmann Hollweg was calling him to account for the roiling instability in Congress Poland. He arrived prepared to defend the multinational model, and deflect blame for unrest to military requisitions, excesses in Ober Ost, and Austrian subversion.[388] Beseler also proposed to salvage plans for a German-Polish union through a four-pronged approach: settling the borders of the new Polish state, its constitutional relationship with the German Empire, its military organization, and economic and trade policy.[389] Beseler again managed to convince the imperial leadership during the conference in Kreuznach on 13 June. The conference once more resolved to continue German efforts to build a German-Polish union, and to adopt Beseler's proposed reforms.[390] The GGW would focus on the "slow but steady" development of the TRS into a fully articulated Polish government, hopefully earning Polish trust and gratitude in the process.[391] Policy-makers also resolved to more carefully consider Polish economic needs when calibrating requisitions, insofar as the constraints of the war economy would permit this.[392] The following day, Beseler confirmed the outlines of this policy in an interview with the Kaiser. In addition to sanctioning the creation of a German-Polish union, the Kaiser also "endorsed" Beseler's recommendation of extending the Kingdom of Poland eastward.[393] Wilhelm II further encouraged Beseler to make any decisions he considered necessary on his own initiative.[394] By the summer of 1917, a whole litany of frictions in Warsaw and throughout German-occupied Poland had tested German policy-makers' central assumption that Poles would eventually accept a German-Polish union as legitimate. But these frictions had not yet, for the most part, convinced policy-makers that multinational imperialism in Poland was either implausible or disadvantageous. Beseler enjoyed the continued confidence of the Kaiser and key imperial agencies in Berlin.

Beseler immediately set to work on repairing the situation in occupied Poland, laying out a new policy of accommodation in a 20 June memo for the GGW.[395] He enjoined his subordinates to mitigate local economic hardships as best they could, arguing that Germany must alleviate the

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[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 196; Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 74; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 188.
[385] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Friedrich Naumann, 26 June 1917," June 26, 1917, 120, N30/23, BArch.
[386] von Beseler, "Note to Paul von Hindenburg, 6 June 1917," 42–43.
[387] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Notes for the Upcoming Conference with the Chancellor, 8 June 1917," June 8, 1917, 173, N30/14, BArch.
[388] Ibid., 173–74.
[389] Ibid., 175.
[390] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg and Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Revised Guidelines for Polish Policy Established at Kreuznach Conference, 13 June 1917," June 13, 1917, 186, N30/14, BArch.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid.
[393] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 23 June 1917," June 23, 1917, 95, R1501/119672, BArch.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Memorandum for Circulation in the GGW on Policy Guidelines Established at Kreuznach," June 20, 1917, 188, N30/14, BArch.

material burden of occupation to convince the Poles of Germany's goodwill, earn their trust, and just as importantly, compete with Polish fantasies of an Austro-Polish solution.[396] The vast quantities of timber and horses requisitioned from the civilian population for the war effort, he wrote, "must be gradually reduced to a more modest level". Compensation for continued requisitions was to be simultaneously increased.[397] Warsaw's university remained closed for the summer. When it reopened in autumn, Beseler continued to follow a conciliatory tactic. The GGW fulfilled its promise and transferred complete authority for the university into Polish hands.[398] Roughly two thousand students enrolled for the 1917-1918 academic year.[399]

The Oath Crisis, July-August 1917.

By July 1917 German policy-makers in Berlin and the GGW were wavering in their commitment to an autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire. Lack of enthusiastic support for the German war effort, the vocal demands of the TRS for more rapid progress in forming a government, and dramatic instances of popular unrest in occupied Poland all challenged German hopes for a stable and productive relationship in the future. Nonetheless, Berlin cautiously proceeded in building a large and militarily capable Polish state, with the intention of binding it in military and political union with the German Empire.

The Oath crisis fundamentally changed the terms of both public and official debates over ethnic management. After July 1917, the balance of support and opposition for multinational imperialism, shifted decisively. Trouble began when Piłsudski, exasperated with the impasse between the TRS and GGW, resigned from his position as a member of the TRS. He was soon followed by the left wing of the council.[400] Though the resignations detracted the from the prestige and legitimacy of the TRS, they also paved the way for the final adoption of a Polish service Oath, unresolved since November. Considering both Vienna's opposition to a "German" oath, and warnings from Polish sympathizers like Studnicki to avoid controversy, the GGW had proposed a compromise oath which declaring allegiance to an as-yet unspecified Polish King, as well as Poland's allies, the Central Powers.[401] Piłsudski and his supporters on the left had stonewalled even this text, but with their resignation, the rump TRS accepted the compromise service oath on 3 July 1917.[402] Germany finally moved to formally swear-in the enlistees and legionnaires, which they had been training for months, as members of the Polish national army.

Swearing-in ceremonies were a disaster. When offered the service oath on 9 July 1917, Piłsudski led roughly two-thirds of the Polish officers in refusing the oath.[403] Of the Polish First Brigade, closely linked to Piłsudski, 2000 men declined to swear the oath. Of the Second Brigade, 267 enlisted-men and 12 officers refused, while 482 troops and 12 officers swore the oath.[404] To occupation officials in Warsaw, the mutiny seemed disturbingly well planned and coordinated. Polish recruits had not merely refused the oath at a single base in Warsaw, but also in training facilities in Ostrów and Zambrów.[405] In Pułtusk, German military personnel reported that Poles had not only refused the oath, but also sharply repudiated the notion of swearing allegiance to the Central Powers as an act of national treachery. Mutineers were reported as saying"Shame on the hirelings, who have sold their honor, against the will of the people, for the sake of their own careers… Long live independent Poland!".[406] The press office tried to rationalize the situation, noting that the political grievances of the mutineers centered on the lack

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[396] Ibid., 190.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Kauffman, "Warsaw University under German Occupation," 74.
[399] Ibid.
[400] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 102.
[401] Władysław Studnicki, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, Undated," July 1917, 303, N30/21, BArch; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 95.
[402] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 95.
[403] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 146.
[404] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 103.
[405] Press Department of the GGW, "Report on Underground Press Activity Following the July Mutiny," July 17, 1917, 98–99, R1501/119831, BArch.
[406] Ibid., 98.

of Polish state institutions, and their belief that any alliance with the central powers should be a negotiated by a Polish government, not written into a service oath.[407] However, many in the GGW perceived the mutiny as an acute threat to the occupation's control over Poland, and the security of the German Empire more broadly. Following the Oath Crisis, Lieutenant Colonel Nethe, Beseler's army Chief of Staff for the GGW, explained that "the danger was not to be dismissed out of hand, that these well trained soldiers, who had stood for more than two years, could instigate unrest and could threaten the [supply] lines of the eastern Army leading through Poland".[408] Warsaw therefore moved quickly to contain the crisis, interning those who had refused the oath as mutineers.[409]

The political situation in Congress Poland, however, deteriorated through July and August. The initial refusal of many enlistees to swear the service oath launched an almost seven week crisis in occupied-Poland. On 15 July 1917 the TRS, against the warnings of the GGW, attempted to restore its credibility by unilaterally asserting its own status as the "highest Polish political authority" and claiming sole command of the Polish national army. The TRS also attempted to claim that the Polish army could not be deployed to the front without its consent.[410] As the planned statement explicitly contradicted German designs for military supremacy over the Polish army, Beseler blocked the announcement's publication, deepening the already yawning rift with between the GGW and TRS.[411] Concerned about the reliability of Legionnaires who had refused to swear the oath, Berlin and Vienna also agreed to quietly purge the Polish army in August and transferred all Austrian subjects back to the AOK's command.[412] Incensed, the remaining members of the TRS resigned on 24 August.[413]

The Long Oath Crisis smashed German confidence in multinational imperialism, appearing to directly contradict its central assumption that Poles could be trusted to collaborate with the German Empire and reliably defend a German-Polish union in the future.[414] Flouting even a compromise service oath, Polish soldiers seemed unwilling to accept anything less than complete independence. The Oath Crisis also cast doubt on the GGW's ability to instrumentalize Polish elites to shape either public sentiment or the policies of the Polish state. Proponents of nationalizing imperialism pounced upon the Oath Crisis as vindication of their dire warnings against organizing, training, and arming Polish nationals. The crisis simultaneously shook the confidence of German multinationalists. All surely wondered whether a stable German-Polish union remained a plausible imperial goal. Some of the most vocal and important proponents of multinational imperialism concluded that multinational union was more likely to endanger imperial security than fortify it. They either quietly abandoned their support for the project, or

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[407] Ibid., 95.
[408] Nethe, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 29 December 1917," December 29, 1917, 214, R1501/119831, BArch.
[409] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 103.
[410] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Michaelis, 27 August 1917," August 27, 1917, 73, N2176/58, BArch.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Germany's new Chancellor, Georg Michaelis, pushed for this transfer from early August 1917. Georg Michaelis, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 3 August 1917," August 3, 1917, 2, N30/15, BArch.
[413] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 103.
[414][414] Prior treatments of the Oath Crisis have not examined its fundamental impact on how German imperialists evaluated the prospects of various models of imperial management. Fischer, almost completely overlooked the Oath Crisis and its substantial impact on German understandings of ethnic management. In his weighty volume, the whole affair receives precisely three lines, during which Fischer merely cites the mutiny to demonstrate the unpopularity of the German occupation and its plans for Poland. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 454. Surprisingly, Geiss's coverage of the crisis is little better. He does not explicitly mention the mutiny which kicked off the crisis, discussing only the subsequent arrest of Piłsudski. Believing that German aims in Poland remained essentially stable throughout the war, Geiss does not suggest that the crisis altered German attitudes towards negotiation or collaboration with Poland. Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 38. More recent analyses have improved substantially. Kauffman's account, for instance, notes the frustration and consternation provoked in German military and government circles by the Oath Crisis. Kauffman, however, focuses on the ongoing commitment of German policy-makers to building an autonomous Polish "satellite-state". His analysis, therefore, focuses on the GGW's efforts to restore order and revive its imperial project in Poland after July 1917. It is less interested in how the Oath Crisis shifted and altered these plans. Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 102–5.

began actively opposing the construction of a German-Polish union. Convinced that Polish nationalism represented an intrinsic threat to the German Empire, some even began to advocate alternative nationalizing models of imperial organization. Others remained committed to the multinationalist project, but demanded new modifications of imperial policy to insulate Germany against the possibility of Warsaw's eventual betrayal.

The Oath Crisis devastated proponents of multinational imperialism in part because they had invested such high hopes in the Polish national army as a vehicle for German influence and a forum for institutionalized German-Polish collaboration. Beseler had insisted that successfully organizing a Polish national army was essential to demonstrating the plausibility of a German-Polish union, and to laying the foundations for mutual trust between Warsaw and Berlin. He and his subordinates in the GGW understood German control over the Polish army as the single most effective means of cultivating influence in Warsaw.[415] The GGW needed to prove that an army could be both indisputably Polish and a reliable military instrument for the German Kaiser. Without a Polish army, Beseler feared that neither Poles nor the international community would seriously believe in Warsaw's autonomy, much less regard the Kingdom of Poland as legitimate.[416] In January 1917 Beseler had stated that it would be "extraordinarily unfortunate" if Polish soldiers refused to swear a service oath which gestured towards the Central Powers.[417]

The Oath Crisis also seemed to challenge the GGW's fundamental strategy for coopting Polish national elites. Saxon General Felix Barth had begun retraining legionary units to Prussian standards in January 1917.[418] The Polish Legions themselves suffered from a deep political split between the Piłsudski's independence-minded idealists and the followers of the Austrophile Władysław Sikorski.[419] Both Sikorski and Beseler distrusted Piłsudski, but Beseler felt he needed the charismatic leader of the PPS to lend popular legitimacy to the Polish national army. Beseler had therefore brought Piłsudski into the new army as Sikorski's subordinate.[420] This, of course, followed the GGW's strategy of utilizing the influence of national elites to shape broader political opinion.

The strategy backfired. Piłsudski had long worked to infiltrate the legions with personnel committed to national independence and connected to the POW Following his incorporation into the nascent Polish army, he did his utmost to seize personal control of the military apparatus. Through the spring of 1917, small anti-German and pro-Piłsudski cells began to crop up in Polish training camps. Already some staged minor acts of resistance, like refusing to don the new uniforms provided for Polish troops because they were nearly identical to German uniforms.[421]

In the wake of the Oath Crisis even Beseler began to doubt the potential reliability of a Polish army. For a time, he attempted to downplay the mutiny, or offer alternative explanations for the Polish soldiers' dramatic rejection of German leadership. He attributed the crisis to discontent over delays in the creation of Polish government institutions.[422] He again blamed German-Austrian dualism in occupied Poland for making it difficult to respond to TRS requests in a timely fashion, breeding the popular misconception that Germany was simply ignoring the Polish government.[423] Only the apparent impotence of the TRS and slow progress in organizing an army, the Governor General insisted, had allowed Piłsudski and his followers in the POW to exploit popular mistrust and acquire so much influence within the army rank and file.[424]

But even as he deflected blame for the crisis, Beseler also revealed his growing distrust for the TRS. He described its attempt to claim authority over the Polish army in the middle of the

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[415] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 24 January 1917," 38.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Ibid. Austro-Hungarian officers were allowed to participate, but only under the supervision of German officers and only as "company commanders and subaltern officers". Civil Administration of the GGW, "Materials Compiled to Brief the Governor General before the Berlin Conference," 44.
[419] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 71.
[420] Ibid., 91.
[421] Ibid., 99.
[422] von Beseler, "Report to Chancellor Michaelis, 27 August 1917," 72.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Ibid., 73.

crisis as a disconcerting challenge to Berlin's ultimate goals for the Kingdom of Poland.[425] This was deeply provocative, and Beseler clearly worried about his ability to direct political elites in Warsaw. In subsequent weeks, Beseler's interpretation of the mutiny's causes also shifted meaningfully, now focusing on active subversion of German goals by malign Polish nationalists. He soon stressed the infiltration of "politically compromised troops" into the recruitment strations previously established across occupied Poland. Rather than honestly cooperating with the GGW to build a Polish army, Beseler argued, they had fallen "under the influence of underground, revolutionary elements" and had sought to derail "any army formation according to the German model" through "agitation directed against occupation authorities".[426] In a stark departure from his previous assesments, Beseler now recognized that hostility towards the German Empire constituted a powerful undercurrent within Polish nationalist politics which was inspiring active subversion in Congress Poland.[427]

Despite his doubts, Beseler still considered this hostile thread of Polish nationalism surmountable, and remained committed to the creation of a German-Polish union. However, Beseler suggested moving more cautiously toward this aim. He continued to support the training of a Polish army as an indispensible means to achieve German goals. However, recognizing that a Polish army could threaten German security if either Warsaw or nationalist forces decided to turn the army against the German Empire, Beseler recommended proceeding more deliberately in the organization of the Polish army to ensure its reliability or. In early August he admitted that, in light of "incidents" related to the "swearing-in" of Polish troops, the German Empire could no longer reasonably trust the Polish state with any "large army" until the Central Powers had secured victory in the present war. A sizeable Polish force, he continued, was "incompatible with order and security" in the German rear and the Kingdom of Poland specifically.[428] Chastened by the Oath Crisis and concerned that hostile nationalist factions might still seize control of the Polish military, he argued that caution was necessary to ensure the loyalty of the Polish army, and to avoid creating a new military threat behind Germany's eastern front.[429]

Under the strain of the Oath Crisis, the consensus of GGW officials in support of Beseler's multinationalist agenda finally broke. Convinced by the mutiny that Berlin simply could not trust a future Polish state to defend German interests, prominent figures in the occupation government began to advocate abandoning or revising plans for a German-Polish union. The Oath Crisis drove Wolfgang von Kries to demand that broad safeguards of German security compliment any continued effort to build a multinational union with Poland. Following the resignation of the left wing of the TRS on 3 July, Beseler's deputy considered the political situation essentially hopeless.[430] In order to preserve the bare minimum of legitimacy, he believed, the TRS had been compelled by public opinion to make demands that the GGW simply could not accept without compromising their own authority.[431] Kries recognized that stonewalling the TRS demands would completely discredit the Polish government and substantiate PPS accusations of German perfidy.[432] The immediate transfer of substantial domestic authority to the Polish government, Kries warned Beseler, represented the only possible avenue for salvaging the credibility of the TRS, and with it any prospect for establishing a stable German-Polish union in the future.[433] Though open to multinational union, Kries already doubted the project's feasibility enough that he simultaneously urged his superiors to adopt new contingencies to secure German interests in case Warsaw proved an unreliable satellite. On 5 July 1917 Kries therefore recommended the annexation of a "military security strip" along the Prussian border, regardless

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[425] Ibid.
[426] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 13 October 1917," 182.
[427] Ibid., 183.
[428] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellery, 5 August 1917," August 5, 1917, 152, N30/23, BArch.
[429] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 13 October 1917," 183.
[430] Wolfgang von Kries, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler on the Political Situation in Poland, 5 July 1917," July 5, 1917, 288–91, R1501/119782a, BArch.
[431] Ibid., 289–90.
[432] Ibid., 291.
[433] Ibid., 292.

of whether Berlin concluded formal treaties of military and political union with Warsaw.[434]

Dissent was not limited to the upper echelons of the GGW. On 21 July 1917 one GGW official in Warsaw submitted an unsigned memorandum to the RAI.[435] The memorandum stated the author's belief that Germany's multinationalist imperial agenda in Poland had failed, and should be abandoned immediately. Though the author conceded that Germany had made serious political errors, the memorandum argued that reconciling German imperial interests with Polish national interests remained essentially impossible, and that Polish nationalists would always plot against Berlin. Drawing upon the disappointing experience of the occupation so far, the memo argued that the Polish nationalist intelligentsia had been "clever enough" to manipulate Germany and Austria-Hungary into promising statehood, but had never actually intended to join the "battle against the Entente".[436] Legionnaires stationed in regional administrative offices and recruitment centers, the author noted, had "engaged in pronounced anti-German agitation in in the worst way, and had also not shied away from the abuse of German soldiers and gendarmes".[437] Indeed, the author believed that most Polish national elites still hoped for an Entente victory, anticipating that Germany's defeat would allow Poland to seize Galicia, Posen, and Danzig.[438]

> In my view it is clear that Poland will never be a reliably friendly ally to us. Poland will always have the wish to reacquire Polish regions of Prussia, and thereby to reach the sea.[439]

No concessions, he insisted, could deflect or otherwise satisfy these nationalist ambitions. Poland would "blindly pursue every constellation, which promises to fulfill its never-to-be-satisfied national wishes".[440] "We may never count on the assistance of the Poles in a new war," the memo stated bluntly. "We must secure our borders so that we can also survive without Poland".[441]

The official then recommended dismantling the multinationalist project, dissolving the TRS, and disbanding Polish military units which were more likely to fight "against us" than for the German Empire.[442] Both, the memorandum claimed, had become precisely what nationalizing imperialists had warned: a politically institutionalized and militarily organized leadership for a nation, which remained implacably and irreconcilably hostile to the German Empire. "It would be criminally negligent to tolerate this unreliable society in the rear of our fighting troops", the author warned.[443] Instead, he argued, the German Empire should fortify its eastern frontier through substantial annexations along the Polish border, and then hand over the rest of Congress Poland to Austria-Hungary or Russia.[444]

Important local functionaries of the GGW also began to question the strategic wisdom of organizing a government for a nation so apparently hostile to German interests. Beseler's *Kreischef* for Skierniewice, Karl von Carmer, considered the Oath Crisis the final straw. On 28 July 1916 he submitted a scathing memorandum accusing the Polish Legions, the POW, and other nationalists had systematically conspiring to resist and betray the German Empire.

> … so has the increasing dissatisfaction and bitterness against the German government been systematically stoked through the recruitment commands of the Polish Legion, which have covered the entire Government General since the

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[434] Ibid., 294.
[435] It is entirely possible that this was penned by Wolfgang von Kries himself, or submitted with his authorization. Wolfgang von Kries, ed., "Memorandum on Occupation Policy in the GGW, 21 July 1917," July 21, 1917, 123, R1501/119791, BArch.
[436] Ibid., 124.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Ibid.
[439] Ibid.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Ibid.
[442] Ibid., 125.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid., 124–25.

winter of 1916/1917…[445]

Carmer accused the Legions in particular of "fomenting hatred against Germany… to the fullest extent", styling themselves as the "protectors of an oppressed Poland" and inciting the "nation" [*Volk*] against the German occupation.[446] He described the "rejection of the oath" as the culmination of this nationalist subversion.[447]

With Poland's influential national elites actively working to subvert the occupation, Carmer declared his lack of confidence in the GGW's original plan to establish an autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire.[448] Carmer expected only the continued deterioration of occupier-occupied relations. Indeed, the *Kreischef* worried about potential "turmoil on a large scale" in the coming months.[449] He therefore urged the German policy-makers to abandon their multinational strategy, or at least substantially alter Germany's objectives to better protect the empire from Polish treachery. Admitting that Berlin's prestige and international credit would suffer if it rescinded the proclamation of 5 November, Carmer suggested a large strip of Polish territory to secure Prussia's eastern border, before handing over the rest of Congress-Poland to Vienna's custody.[450]

The Oath Crisis also deeply unnerved the military officials responsible for maintaining order in the GGW. During the crisis, Nethe worried that the mutineers might take up arms against the German occupation as the vanguard of a broader nationalist revolt. He strongly supported the immediate internment of all mutineers, as "people trained in the use of weapons would have severely threatened" the security of the German army's rear.[451] Nethe oversaw a crackdown on nationalist organizations following the mutiny. Believing the agitation of Piłsudski and the POW to have been instrumental in subverting the Polish army, Nethe supported "sharp measures" to suppress nationalist "insubordination".[452] Occupation troops moved aggressively against the POW, prosecuting house searches, arresting Piłsudski and other suspected leaders, and detaining 88 suspected members of the paramilitary organization in Germany.[453]

Nethe's panicked repression reflected a new paranoia among occupation officials. In the eyes of German military and civilian officials throughout occupied-Poland, nationalist tensions and unrest appeared far more threatening in the wake of the July mutiny. occupation officials could no longer easily dismiss Polish nationalism as politically marginal, internally fractured, unable to inspire ideological commitment, and ultimately easy to manipulate to German ends. On the contrary, GGW authorities now worried that Polish nationalism was resolutely hostile to the German Empire, ideologically, rather than socially, motivated, and broadly subscribed to by the Polish population. German perceptions of the POW again vividly illustrate this point. By 1917 the POW had expanded substantially, numbering approximately 13,000 members scattered in 200 local units across the Kingdom of Poland.[454] German perceptions of the nationalist paramilitary changed materially over the summer of 1917, as did their countermeasures. Occupation police cracked down on the organization. Social initiatives and surveillance were replaced with a show of force. On 11 August 1917, German police in Warsaw raided the residence of a suspected POW member and seized military grade weapons and documents.[455] Occupation police found a small arsenal of firearms, including 66 Austrian-made carbines, a cache of ammunition, and other military paraphernalia. They suspected that the equipment had

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[445] Karl von Carmer, "Die Gegentwärtige Lage der Deutschen in Generalgouvernement Warschau," July 28, 1917, 112, R1501/119791, BArch.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid., 112–13.
[448] Ibid., 117.
[449] Ibid., 112–13.
[450] Ibid., 118.
[451] Nethe, "Bericht an die Nachrichtenabteilung des Auswärtigen Amts," August 4, 1917, 140, R1501/119831, BArch.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Nethe, "Letter to the Imperial Chancellor, 18 August 1917," August 18, 1917, 139, R1501/119831, BArch.
[454] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 69.
[455] Der Kaiserlich Deutsche Polizeipräsident, "Beschlagnahme von Waffen der POW Organisation, 12 August 1917," August 12, 1917, 184, R1501/119791, BArch.

been stolen by the POW "in collaboration with the legionnaires closely associated to them".[456] Three suspects were arrested, interrogated, and turned over to GGW courts. The Central Police Office in Warsaw concluded their report by vowing to continue its anti-POW campaign.[457] The GGW central administration and Berlin both took a keen interest in this effort, and Kries and Helfferich read the report in question.[458] As occupation authorities increasingly regarded anti-German nationalism as a determined threat, they shifted tactics for responding to paramilitary organization. No longer confident that they could buy off their members, German officials now moved to directly repress these organizations

The growing perception of nationalist threat also conditioned German occupation officials to interpret local instances of unrest as products of organized and coordinated nationalist resistance. This was particularly problematic because the strictures of the British blockade and the burdens of Germany's war economy were weighing increasingly heavy on Polish shoulders in late 1917. Despite German efforts to alleviate the worst hunger, material deprivation instigated constant clashes between occupation personnel and disaffected civilians in late 1917.[459] After the July mutiny, however, paranoid German officials interpreted these clashes as products of a nationalist conspiracy to instigate revolt. A series of reports from Węglowice, a municipality in the Częstochowa district, vividly illustrates this process. In late October, soldiers deployed to collect the recent potato harvest reported meeting "organized" resistance from hundreds of villagers.[460] The local German garrison responded with a swift and heavy hand by deploying an entire reserve battalion, complete with their compliment of machine guns, to requisition the potatoes.[461] When the battalion confronted a crowd of locals throwing stones and brandishing pitchforks, the soldiers opened fire, killing 9 demonstrators and wounding 4 more.[462] Afterward the German Kreischef of Częstochowa claimed that the residents of Węglowice had planned their resistance beforehand, and endorsed the local garrison's rapid action. Only their sharp and violent crackdown, he argued, had dissuaded Poles from further resistance.

> As I heard from trustworthy Poles on the spot, the people had actually been meeting for several days, and I believe I may be assume, that the upheaval would have drawn in further circles, if it not been approached with all sharpness from the military-side.[463]

Both the bloodshed in Węglowice and the Kreischef's report illustrate two important changes in how occupation officials regarded the Polish population. First a mounting paranoia had conditioned them to quickly perceive local disturbances as products nationalist subversion. Secondly, German personnel were increasingly willing to resort to disproportionate, and demonstrative military violence, to suppress perceived resistance and reassert German authority.

This new instinct to meet civilian resistance with harsh and coercive measures was apparent at all levels of the GGW administration. Even as Beseler urged Germany to negotiate with and accommodate the demands of Polish leaders in Warsaw, he authorized his military governors to crush any and all resistance from the occupied population. On 15 November 1917, in response to reports of unrest in the military governorate of Częstochowa, Beseler encouraged his subordinates to take immediate and coordinated action to restore order.

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[456] Ibid., 184–85.
[457] Ibid., 185.
[458] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vorgänge in zusammenhand mit der Auflösung der POW, 1 September 1917," September 1, 1917, 183, R1501/119791, BArch.
[459] Lehnstaedt, "Fluctuating between 'Utilisation' and Exploitation," 105.
[460] Kreischef of Częstochowa, "Report on Unrest in Węglowice, 28 October 1917," October 28, 1917, 11, R1501/119867a, BArch.
[461] Ibid., 12.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Kreischef of Częstochowa, "Follow-up Report on Unrest in Węglowice, 30 October 1917," October 30, 1917, 16, R1501/119867a, BArch.

> If, according to the discretion of the Military Governor an urgent danger to peace, security, and order requires it, he is justified and obligated to unite under his command and in his hand, by immediate intervention, the entire executive authority [of the governorate], especially also police authority, even if it otherwise lays in the hands of civilian authorities.[464]

Beseler began to see outright martial law as a necessary tool to maintain order over the civilian population. Worried that Polish unrest could quickly spiral out of control, he sought to dismantle the formal legal and procedural obstacles that would prevent German resources from quickly regaining command over local disturbances.

The Oath Crisis also stirred deep consternation among the agencies of the imperial and Prussian governments. The Prussian War Ministry sent a biting indictment of multinationalist policy to the Chancellery on 31 July 1917, signaling the ministry's conviction that significant changes in occupation policy were warranted. The author of the memorandum actually continued to support a multinationalist strategy for Poland, reluctantly arguing that it remained Berlin's best option for securing Eastern Europe.[465] However, he argued, Poles general "behavior" and the entanglement of Polish politics with the nationalist and "revolutionary" movements around Piłsudski could easily "discourage" the most well-intentioned of their "liberators" and disabuse them of any belief in the "possibility of an alliance between Germany and Poland in the future".[466] Indeed, the author accused the TRS of complicity in the Oath Crisis, believing that its members knew of the planned mutiny ahead of time.[467] Given the recent mutiny and the ongoing covert agitation by the POW, the memorandum questioned the potential reliability of any future Polish state or army. "Who then gives the guarantee, that this State Council will be able to resist the Piłsudskiite infection, which is widespread to many circles?"[468]

The author answered by arguing that Berlin could only ensure its "own influence in Poland" through the application of less compromising and more disciplinary methods of command and rule.[469] Congress Poles, he argued, were a "half-wild" people, barbarized by a century of Russian oppression. He described Poles as "immature children", with which German authorities could never hope to negotiate with. He suggested Germany follow the example of Russia, who had the good sense to "suppress revolutionary currents with the lash and gallows".[470] Germany must rule Poland like "Enver Pascha".[471] The author strongly cautioned against making any further concessions to Poles in the wake of the Oath Crisis.[472] Instead, he suggested showing strength and resolve by demanding concrete assurances of Warsaw's fidelity as a prerequisite for further state-building. The Polish government's agreement to a permanent alliance with Germany, their entrance into the war, and a pledge to fight the "anarchical and revolutionary" movements around Piłsudski and the POW should suffice.[473] The War Ministry offered the memorandum to the Chancellery with little comment, suggesting their broad agreement with the author's desire for a more disciplinary approach to occupation policy.

The Polish mutiny similarly sapped the already waning confidence of the OHL in a multinational German-Polish union, though it did not break the OHL's resolve. For the moment, continued to endorse a multinationalist agenda in Poland, writing to the Chancellor on 28 July that should be attached to Germany as an autonomous protectorate.[474] In this matter he was

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[464] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Memorandum Circulated to the Military Governors of the GGW, 15 November 1917," November 15, 1917, 90, N30/6, BArch.
[465] Mielszinski, "Memorandum Submitted to the War Ministry, Forwarded to the Imperial Chancellery, 31 July 1917," July 31, 1917, 140–41, R1501/119791, BArch.
[466] Ibid.
[467] Ibid., 142.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Ibid., 141.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid.
[472] Ibid., 142.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Paul von Hindenburg, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 28 July 1917," July 28, 1917, 52, N30/11, BArch.

probably following Ludendorff's lead. Surprisingly, Ludendorff did not abandon his support for a German-Polish union as a result of the Oath Crisis. Ludendorff did not interpret the mutiny as evidence of the irreconcilability of Polish and German interests. Rather, he blamed the political corruption of the Polish army on the specific influence of Piłsudski and his followers in the Polish Legions.[475] By adjusting German policy to marginalize this influence, Ludendorff still believed that Berlin could establish a reliable political union with Poland in the future. He therefore continued to support state-building efforts in Poland, and even the continued training of a Polish national army for use after the war.[476] Beseler was correct when he confidently asserted on 5 August that the OHL continued to support the accelerated "formation of the Polish state" in all matters "not pertaining to military interests".[477] Indeed, on 16 August 1917, Ludendorff personally intervened with the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, to support Beseler's efforts to finally excise Vienna's influence from the Polish army.[478]

The Oath Crisis did however reinforce Ludendorff's doubts about the reliability of a Polish state. In a 28 July letter to the Chancellor, Ludendorff noted his fear that a Kingdom of Poland might pursue irredentist goals in Prussia and Lithuania.[479] Ludendorff's mounting distrust of the Polish nation led him to recommend considerably reducing the scale and pace state-building in occupied Poland. To begin with, he abandoned his earlier ambitions to use the Polish national army to reinforce the German war effort.

> In view of the unreliable attitude of the Poles and the lack of clarity regarding further political development in the country, and with consideration of the necessity for absolute security in the rear of our Eastern front, we must limit ourselves to the minimum [needed] in order to demonstrate to the Poles our willingness to assist them, in time, towards a useful army.[480]

To continue to organize the largest Polish national army possible, Ludendorff now argued, would endanger Germany's immediate military security, and possibly the German Empire itself. For now, training for the Polish national army could only continue to "the smallest extent possible", perhaps one or two infantry regiments.[481] In a telling departure from prior plans, Ludendorff argued that the Polish army should be technically hobbled and unable to threaten Germany's modern army. For the moment there could be no technical services in the Polish army, nor should their units be equipped with heavy weapons.[482] Until the political situation stabilized, Ludendorff wanted the Polish army to function only as an experienced core of officers for a future military. That Ludendorff continued to support the formation of a Polish army, however, simultaneously indicates his ongoing interest in establishing a German-Polish union.

Ludendorff also called on the GGW to take adopt more severe policies to control and manipulate Polish society. "The Pole must be controlled, day and night, or else he attacks us," Ludendorff is reported to have said in conversations with Felix Somary.[483] "Once the Poles experience our firm hand, they won't budge".[484] On 21 August 1917, Ludendorff urged the Chancellor to foist more strenuous censorship on the Polish press, to finally end criticism which "endangers German policy in the Government General of Warsaw" and "disturbs peace and

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[475] Erich Ludendorff, "Memorandum Regarding the Continued Formation of the Polish Army, 16 September 1917," September 16, 1917, 165, R1501/119831, BArch.
[476] Ibid., 165–66.
[477] von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellery, 5 August 1917," 152.
[478] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 16 August 1917," August 16, 1917, 64, N30/11, BArch.
[479] Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 253.
[480] Ludendorff, "Memorandum Regarding the Continued Formation of the Polish Army, 16 September 1917," 165.
[481] Ibid., 165–66.
[482] Ibid., 166.
[483] Quoted in Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity*, 254.
[484] Quoted in Ibid.

order behind the front" through the "incitement of the Polish population".[485] He demanded that the remnants of the Polish army be "ruthlessly" purged of any unreliable personnel.[486]

A series of political upheavals in July delayed responses to the Polish mutiny by the *Reichsleitung*. Bethmann Hollweg's domestic political support had decayed precipitously over the past months. Worried by Germany's increasingly precarious strategic situation, Erzberger had denounced unrestricted submarine warfare and called for a peace without annexations during a speech in the Reichstag on 6 July.[487] The Chancellor's failure to maintain unqualified Reichstag support for the war effort was his undoing. On 12 July, Ludendorff and Hindenburg threatened the Kaiser with their own resignation unless Bethmann Hollweg were replaced with someone more amenable to the OHL's aggressive military strategy and expansive vision of war aims. At the same time, the Center, FVP, and SPD drafted a peace resolution calling for peace negotiations and renouncing claims to annexations. Having lost the support of the OHL and apparently unable to master the Reichstag, Bethmann Hollweg resigned the Chancellorship on 13 July, replaced by the inexperienced and ineffectual Georg Michaelis.

In the long-term, this considerably weakened the political influence of multinational imperialists in the German government. Bethmann Hollweg had been a staunch proponent of a German-Polish union from early 1916. His close working relationships with Kurt Riezler, Gerhard von Mutius, and Matthias Erzberger had given these multinationalists a privileged degree of influence over imperial strategy. The new Chancellor permitted Erzberger's continued access to Foreign Office files, after some consideration. Yet Michaelis's refusal to grant Erzberger the same freedom of travel he had previously enjoyed materially reduced his influence.[488] But in the short term, disarray in the Chancellery precluded any strong response to the Oath Crisis. Bethmann Hollweg was on his way out and Michaelis had yet to familiarize himself with the complexities of imperial policy towards Poland.

After August 1917, Beseler and the GGW were ultimately able to stabilize the political situation in the Kingdom of Poland, in part by finally creating a Regency Council to replace the TRS and turning over responsibility for the administration of justice and education to the Polish state. Beseler even managed to rebuild the Polish army. Separated from the influence of Piłsudski and his followers, 1,000 Polish soldiers, almost half of the initial mutineers, reneged on their refusal and agreed to swear the service-oath by October 1917.[489] Beseler firmly believed "without a doubt" that these remaining troops, now purged of negative influences, possessed a "good will".[490] By January 1918, Beseler and Barth had rebuilt and expanded the Polish army to approximately 4,000 men.[491] Nonetheless, the Oath Crisis dealt a severe blow to policy-makers trust in the reliability of Polish collaboration. Confidence in multinationalism in Berlin and the GGW would never recover to pre-July levels. German policy would henceforth reflect a lingering suspicion that a Polish state might yet betray the German Empire at any time.

The Oath Crisis also deeply affected debates over imperial management among German intellectuals and publicists. It reinforced concerns that Polish hostility towards Germany was growing, and that efforts to satisfy Polish demands had only emboldened nationalists. On 7 August, an article in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* cited the recent mutiny, the disarmament of the Legions, and the arrest of its leaders to claim that Poles evidently had no interest in friendly collaboration with the German Empire.[492] The journalist wondered why, in the face of

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[485] Erich Ludendorff, "Report to Chancellor Michaelis, 21 August 1917," August 21, 1917, 194, R1501/119791, BArch.
[486] Ludendorff, "Memorandum Regarding the Continued Formation of the Polish Army, 16 September 1917," 166.
[487] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 396.
[488] Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 214.
[489] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 104; Julia Eichenberg, "Consent, Coercion and Endurance in Eastern Europe: Poland and the Fluidity of War Experiences," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 241.
[490] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 13 October 1917," 183.
[491] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 104.
[492] Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten, "Die Deutschen in Polen," August 7, 1917, 98, R1501/119823, BArch.

such obvious hostility, Berlin continued to pursue the "phantom of German-Polish friendship".[493] A 27 July 1917 article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* agreed that "hatred of Germany has, so far as I can confirm from multiple pieces of information, only grown even more during the occupation", indeed as a result of Germany's lenient policies.[494] The *Ostmarkenverein* submitted an open letter to the Chancellor, arguing that Polish "conduct since the proclamation of 5 November" had demonstrated the "irreconcilable antagonism" between the "vital interests" of the German state and the romantic ambitions of the Polish nation. The "natural expansionism of an independent Polish state", the *Ostmarkenverein* argued, would invariably target the German Empire, driving Warsaw to conspire with Russia to seize Posen and the "Vistula estuary".[495] Experience, they argued, had proven the irrationality of erecting an "autonomous Polish Kingdom".[496]

The mutiny hobbled proponents of multinational imperialism, who were now faced with the uncomfortable task of explaining why Polish soldiers had so publicly disavowed collaboration with the German Empire, and why Berlin should trust a Polish army in the future. Some even began to wonder if their support for multinational imperialism had been based upon a false optimism in Polish collaboration. Naumann doubled-down, blaming Germany for failing to establish a *mitteleuropäisch* constitutional framework prior to the creation of a Polish army. A codified federal relationship between Germany and Poland, he suggested, would have clarified the nature of the Polish army and allayed Polish fears of German dominance.[497] Naumann reaffirmed his commitment to the incorporation of Poland into a Central European confederation. But even he now wondered if it was too late to salvage this project.[498] After the Oath Crisis, Axel Schmidt was likewise deeply concerned that efforts to build a German-Polish union were "on the verge of failing".[499] In retrospect, he believed, the Russian revolution had removed the immediate threat of Tsarist imperialism, obviating Poles' desire for the military protection of German suzerainty. Schmidt worried that Poles were increasingly tempted by fantasies of an independent Greater-Polish state.[500] He speculated that many Poles were now interesting in organizing an army for use against the German Empire.[501] He quoted one moderate Pole as saying that calls for "the creation of a Polish army against the Germans and the slogan of the struggle with the Germans over the unification of the Polish lands ring freely, very beautifully, and enticingly".[502] Schmidt wondered if Poles had always intended to betray Berlin and seize Prussian territory at the first opportunity.[503] After the mutiny, he argued, it seemed clear that at least the majority of the legionnaires had never intended to fight alongside the Central Powers. He implied that they had only been a ruse to secure political concessions and promises of statehood.[504] Despite his growing doubts, Schmidt still hoped that a German-Polish union might be possible in the future. He even continued to endorse the eastward expansion of Poland.[505] But German occupation policy, Schmidt argued, must more carefully monitor and restrain the Polish army. Without more rigorous "guarantees" of German security, he warned, "Germany naturally cannot allow Poland to again rise, as it is in a position to so acutely threaten the heart of Prussia".[506]

Indeed, many advocates of multinational imperialism also endorsed a crackdown on Polish nationalist organizations and a forceful reassertion of German supremacy. They still

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[493] Ibid.
[494] Wilhelm Antelhauser, "Petition to State Secretary Helfferich, Including an Excerpt from the Kölnische Zeitung, 27 July 1917," July 27, 1917, 93, R1501/119823, BArch.
[495] Ostmarkenverein, "Open Letter to the Imperial Chancellor, 1 October 1917," October 1, 1917, 4, R1501/119792, BArch.
[496] Ibid., 4–5.
[497] Friedrich Naumann, "Mitteleuropäische Sorgen," *Deutsche Politik* 2, no. 29 (July 20, 1917): 855–56.
[498] Ibid., 857.
[499] Axel Schmidt, "Was geht in Polen vor," *Deutsche Politik* 2 (September 7, 1917): 11.
[500] Ibid., 1146.
[501] Ibid., 1146–47.
[502] Ibid., 1147.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Ibid., 1151.
[506] Ibid.

considered multinational union possible, but believed it required considerably more coercion, and less negotiation with native elites, to create and stabilize. One private citizen submitted a letter to the Kaiser expressing his outrage over the Polish mutiny, accusing Polish nationalists of taking advantage of the "weak political leadership of the Central Powers" to advance a greater-Polish agenda.[507] He further accused the TRS of foreknowledge of and complicity in, the mutiny.[508] An autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty, the author continued, remained Germany's best strategic option in the east, though he believed that Berlin needed to forcefully reassert its supremacy and dragoon the Poles into line. He argued that the Polish mutiny had abrogated a duty to aid the Central Powers implied in the 5 November manifest, and therefore released Berlin from its obligation to establish a Kingdom of Poland. He therefore suggested disarming the Polish army, and then presenting an ultimatum to the TRS, offering an autonomous Polish state in the future, "perhaps as a German federal state", on the condition that the Warsaw immediately conscripted Poles into the ranks of the *German* army during the present war.[509] If rejected, the author proposed the dissolution of the TRS and the Polish state.[510]

This letter was unique for its radical proposal to blackmail the TRS, but it was representative of a broader trend among established multinationalist intellectuals, many of whom agreed that the more forceful application of German power might be necessary to realize a German-Polish union. The multinationalist historian F. Helmolt was deeply shaken by the "unmistakable and numerous setbacks" in Poland, chief among them Piłsudski's "treasonous intrigues" and the mutiny of the Polish army.[511] Despite these setbacks Helmolt remained convinced that the "economic-military dependence of Poland on Germany" represented Germany's best strategy for shortening its border with Russia and augmenting its own military power.[512] He maintained that the Oath Crisis represented a temporary setback, and that Poles would eventually accept an autonomous state under German leadership.[513] Nonetheless, Helmolt could not ignore his own lingering doubts over the reliability of a future Polish state, and therefore suggested a cautious approach. Germany, he believed, should only create a small Polish state. Suwałki, of course, was to remain in German hands, and there could be no more discussion of an "expansion of Poland to the city of Vilnius and in the direction of White Ruthenia".[514] Moreover, Helmolt suggested that, in the event of failure to secure military union with Poland, Germany's contingency plan should be to "incorporate" a "glacis" of Polish territory, minimally encompassing the Njemen, Bobr, and Narew lines.[515]

Paul Rohrbach similarly continued to support the creation of a German-Polish Union, though concerns of Polish reliability altered his views of eastern Europe considerably. Rohrbach had long promoted the creation of a Ukrainian state and its integration into a broader German-led confederation, both to augment German economic strength and deprive Russia of essential resources. By August 1917, he also described a Ukrainian client as an indispensible strategic counterweight to Poland. A close German-Ukrainian relationship, he argued, would isolate and encircle the Kingdom of Poland, deterring Warsaw from betraying the German Empire and effectively mandating its obedience to Berlin. Surrounded by a "hostile Ukraine in the rear", Rohrbach hoped that any "Polish danger" would be "nipped in the bud".[516] Rohrbach still favored trading autonomy for Poland's loyalty to a military and political union with Germany. But now he wanted this loyalty guaranteed by the threat of swift military retribution from three fronts.

July 1917 also saw a prominent defection from the camp of multinationalist intellectuals.

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[507] R. Proels, "Memorandum on the Polish Question, Submitted to the Kaiser, 14 August 1917," August 14, 1917, 217–18, R1501/119795, BArch.
[508] Ibid., 218.
[509] Ibid., 219–20.
[510] Ibid., 221.
[511] Hans F. Helmolt, *Die Wiederherstellung Polens: eine Gedenkschrift* (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1917), 52.
[512] Ibid., 18–22.
[513] Ibid.
[514] Ibid., 22.
[515] Ibid.
[516] "Notizen," *Deutsche Politik* 2, no. 32 (August 10, 1917): 1135.

Georg Cleinow had left his post as chief of the GGW press department in the late summer of 1916, shortly after drafting an extensive memorandum in support of establishing an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty.[517] For the first months of 1917, Cleinow remained surprisingly quiet on Polish policy. Cleinow broke his silence in the 21 July 1917 issue of *Die Grenzboten*, dramatically renouncing his former public and official support of a German-Polish union in a scathing broadside against a recent article by Wilhelm von Massow in *Deutsche Politik*. In the article, Cleinow denounced Massow's continued endorsement of multinational imperialism as both recklessly optimistic and willfully blind to political developments since 5 November 1916.[518] He argued that Poles had categorically demonstrated their overwhelming and deeply rooted opposition to Germany, and believed that Berlin could in no way rely upon a Polish state as a reliable component of the German Empire. Cleinow cited routine complaints by German officers and soldiers about the insubordination and antipathy of the Polish Legions, and pointed out that legionnaires seemed to be deliberately provoking and directing civilian hatred against the occupation.[519] Both, he argued, were indicative of a growing hostility to Germany. In light of Poles' obvious disdain for the German Empire, Cleinow argued that Massow's proposal to wait and observer developments was reckless, bordering on treasonous.[520]

Key to Cleinow's change in attitude towards multinational imperialism was his disenchantment with the strategy of political management premised on a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism. Cleinow argued that GGW policy-makers had fatally misinterpreted Polish national sentiment and political culture.[521] Specifically, Cleinow concluded that Germany could not gain reliable control over the only Polish elites that actually seemed to significantly influence broader national sentiment; the political intelligentsia. He still firmly believed that the majority of the Polish population was on balance ambivalent about Poland's destiny. The peasantry seemed equivocal. The aristocracy were fractured in their loyalties.[522] Yet in critical moments, Cleinow believed, the only socio-political group that could really shape national sentiment, political narratives, perceptions of threat, and visions of the future, was the "spiritual leaders" of the nation, which he later identified as the "teachers, clergy, trade-union leaders, and writers" of Poland.[523] Unfortunately, Cleinow lamented, the nationalist intelligentsia of Poland shared a "firm opinion" about their "own wishes for the future", which was irreconcilable with the interests of the German Empire.[524] Cleinow identified three axioms of the Polish nationalist intelligentsia. First, Germany not Russia, represented the primary threat to the Polish nation, and therefore its greatest enemy. Second, the Polish state must be united with Galicia, and thereafter reclaim Upper Silesia, Posen, West Prussia, and Masuria from Prussian hands. Finally, Poland should cultivate a close economic relationship with Russia.[525]

Because these three axioms would invariably shape Warsaw's future decisions, Cleinow now believed that German efforts to build a Polish state were strategically counterproductive. The GGW, Cleinow argued, seemed to be building a state destined to betray it and arming it with a military trained and equipped to German standards. Indeed, he believed that occupation policy had already served the Polish nationalist intelligentsia by effectively organizing and institutionalizing their power.

> It [the occupation] has given the Poles all of the resources of organization,

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[517] Wolfgang von Kries, "Vierteljahresbericht bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau, 30 June 1916," June 30, 1916, 53, PH30-II/12, BArch.
[518] Georg Cleinow, "Die Zustände in Polen," *Die Grenzboten* 3 (July 21, 1917): 165–68.GB 1917.3, 165-168.
[519] Ibid., 167.
[520] Ibid. Cleinow painted a colorful image, comparing Massow to a medieval alchemist, waiting to see whether his poorly-understood concoction produced something useful or if it detonated his laboratory.
[521] Ibid., 168.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid.; Georg Cleinow, "Vom polnischen Bauplatz: Zum Kaiserlichen Erlaß an den Generalgouverneur in Warschau von 12. September 1917," *Die Grenzboten* 3, no. 39 (September 1917): 391.
[524] Cleinow, "Die Zustände in Polen," 168.
[525] Ibid.

> including a primary-school hostile to Germandom,[·] and it leaves it to them, to employ these newly acquired powers to benefit the Poles, irrespective of whether this power shall operate against us or for us.[526]

The university and other institutions established by the GGW to shape a capable pro-German technical and political elite, he implied, was instead training the intractable enemies of Germany for their eventual betrayal. Cleinow now demanded that "our Warsaw politicians" accept the reality of Polish-German enmity, abandon their efforts to use Poland as a "tool of our policy", and instead focus on crippling the Polish state, neutralizing it as an independent threat to the German Empire, and ensuring its "uselessness as a tool of our opponents".[527]

In a post-script, Cleinow claimed that he had actually drafted his rebuke of Massow while in Flanders, before hearing of the 9 July crisis. The accumulating political frictions between the GGW and Polish government, between occupiers and locals, and between nationalist activists and the German Empire had apparently disenchanted Cleinow by the summer of 1917. He proceeded to argue that the mutiny, which included ostensible "trustees and close collaborators" of the occupation only "confirmed" how misguided German policy had been to rely upon the fidelity and influence of these elites.[528]

Given time to ruminate on the mutiny, Cleinow's concerns about German imperial policy in Poland only deepened. The mutiny only proved to him that Polish leaders desired the eventual defeat of the Central Powers.[529] In subsequent articles, Cleinow argued that German-Polish "conflicts of interest" were indissoluble and inevitable, especially given Polish desires for Prussian territory.[530] "With the "overwhelmingly great majority" of Poland's "spiritual leaders" adamantly opposed to reconciliation with the German Empire, he argued the occupation could not hope to ever convince the population of the legitimacy and value of a German-Polish union.[531] By contrast, the social elites upon which the GGW had depended to mediate their influence had proven themselves impotent "politicians of the Salon", out of touch with the real parties, brokers, opinions, and ideologies which could sway the Polish masses.[532]

Cleinow soon identified a Polish state as an existential threat to the German Empire. He accused unscrupulous Polish nationalists of contacting Entente governments and conspiring against the German Empire. He even suggested that this was done with the tacit complicity of the Polish government, representing, in effect, Warsaw's attempt at an "independent foreign policy".[533] He therefore implied that the German government and the occupation should move to quarantine Poland, politically isolating the state by preventing the travel of suspect politicians like Korfanty to neutral countries.[534]

Cleinow's position on imperial policy in Poland rapidly evolved from vocal skepticism to adamant opposition towards plans for a German-Polish union. In August Cleinow suggested abandoning fanciful and dangerous ambitions for German suzerainty and instead using Congress Poland as a "bargaining chip" to secure a favorable separate peace with Russia.[535] Following the mass resignation of the TRS on 24 August, Cleinow stated bluntly that "The policy of the 5

[·] In fact, the GGW had repaired, reopened, and even founded *many* primary schools in occupied Poland. By his use of the singular *"Volksschule*", Cleinow is apparently referring to the University of Warsaw. It is unclear whether describing it as a primary school was intended to impugn its intellectual credibility, or to suggest that it was a school that introduced Polish society to anti-German nationalism. The components of the word could indeed be interpreted as "school of the nation".

[526] Cleinow, "Die Zustände in Polen," 168.
[527] Ibid., 169.
[528] Ibid.
[529] Georg Cleinow, "Wohin geht die Reise," *Die Grenzboten* 3 (August 13, 1917): 204.
[530] Cleinow, "Vom polnischen Bauplatz," 387.
[531] Ibid., 391.
[532] Georg Cleinow, "Polnische Irrungen," *Die Grenzboten* 3, no. 37 (1917): 346–47.
[533] Cleinow, "Wohin geht die Reise," 201; Georg Cleinow, "Friedenszurüstungen," *Die Grenzboten* 4, no. 49 (December 3, 1917): 258.
[534] Cleinow, "Wohin geht die Reise," 204.
[535] Ibid., 205.

November 1916 has disintegrated".[536] Berlin, he insisted, must now take this opportunity to reset German imperial strategy. "If we want to build a bulwark against Russia, so we must have the courage, to make it ourselves".[537] The implied endorsement of large annexations was unambiguous.

The Formation of a Regency Council and Impasse over the Selection of a Polish Minister-President, September-November 1917

New conflicts and disappointments with the GGW's efforts to build a functioning and pliable Polish government only further eroded confidence in the potential value of a German Polish union. To stabilize the volatile political situation in the Kingdom of Poland, Vienna and Berlin together agreed in late July to establish a Regency Council as the provisional executive body of the new Polish state.[538] The occupation government framed the creation of a Regency council as a fulfillment of the TRS petition of 3 July 1917. In reality, it only met Polish demands halfway.[539] Seeing the necessity of a political stop-gap, Kries and Beseler ultimately dropped their prior opposition to a native regency council on the condition that it would proclaim "itself unequivocally on the side of the Central Powers and renounce all claims to German- or Austrian-Poland in perpetuity".[540] Beseler also wanted to withhold any further instantiation of the executive branch until Poland formally accepted union with the German Empire. Specifically, the Governor General wanted the precondition for the final selection of a regent to be Poland's acceptance German suzerainty.[541]

A three-person Regency council was therefore established in September and invested with at least nominal sovereignty over the Polish state. The Central Powers agreed to Archbishop Aleksander Kakowski, Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski, and Józef Ostrowski, as members, producing a narrowly conservative aristocratic and clerical council.[542] This reflected, both the GGW's belief that these elites were most likely to cooperate with Berlin, and the occupation's ongoing strategy to use the social and cultural influence of the clergy and aristocracy to shape the opinion of the peasantry to German ends. While the Oath Crisis had shaken the faith of German policy-makers in the effectiveness of this strategy, for the moment they evidently saw no better alternative. Initially, the enterprise seemed promising. Archbishop Kakowski, for instance, purportedly supported the continued formation of a Polish army and concluding an "unbreakable alliance with the Central Powers".[543]

The formation of the Regency Council represented only the centerpiece of a broader campaign by the GGW to reestablish Polish trust in the German Empire in the wake of the Oath Crisis. Beseler had decided to meet at least some of the TRS's demands after the mutiny. He therefore accelerated the planned turnover of strategically non-essential domestic portfolios to the Polish government, including responsibility for education and culture, the administration of justice, and some aspects of finance.[544] On 1 September 1917, the GGW handed over jurisdiction for criminal and civil justice to Poland's new justice ministry.[545] This was followed in October by the transfer of responsibility for public and higher education to the Polish government.[546] After handing over each portfolio, the GGW began dismantling the occupation apparatus previously

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[536] Cleinow, "Polnische Irrungen," 346.
[537] Ibid., 347.
[538] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 62; Theodor Lewald and Wolfgang von Kries, "Protocol of Negotiations with Austria-Hungary over Continued State-Building in Poland, 28-30 July 1917," July 30, 1917, 63, R1501/119712, BArch.
[539] Lewald and von Kries, "Protocol of Negotiations with Austria-Hungary over Continued State-Building in Poland, 28-30 July 1917," 69.
[540] Karl Helfferich, "Report to Chancellor Michaelis, 3 August 1917," August 3, 1917, 137, R1501/119712, BArch.
[541] von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellery, 5 August 1917," 153.
[542] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 104; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 146.
[543] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Report on the Assembly of the KPP, 19 September 1917," September 19, 1917, 247, R1501/119791, BArch.
[544] von Beseler, "Letter to the Chancellery, 5 August 1917," 152.
[545] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 143; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 158.
[546] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 145.

responsible for the matter.[547] Propitiously, the University of Warsaw also reopened in November 1917, its student body chastised but its administration now completely in Polish hands. The GGW reserved only the right to veto university faculty and personnel decisions.[548]

The announcement of the Regency Council on 12 September initially seemed to reassure Polish observers of the German Empire's commitment to Polish autonomy. GGW officials, at least, were optimistic. Kries reported that the announcement had been well received by the Polish population.[549] Indeed, positive reports on the salutary effect of the announcement on public opinion continued to arrive in Warsaw through the autumn of 1917.[550] For the moment GGW leaders hoped that they finally had a government that was both pliable to German demands and perceived as legitimate by Poles.[551] On 19 September Lubomirski, for instance, had accepted Beseler's offer to sit on the Council. He even accepted the GGW's explicit conditions designed to bring the Polish government under Germany's control.[552] Lubomirski agreed that the Kingdom of Poland would be politically attached to the Central Powers in the future. He further acknowledged the need for the Polish government to publicly distance itself from claims to Prussian territory.[553] Occupation leaders hoped to quickly capitalize on the achievement and to set the council to work by late September.[554]

This timeline proved overambitious and occupation officials were soon beset by new frustrations in forming a Polish government, which again reinforced German perceptions that Polish political elites were unwilling to collaborate with the German Empire. The sticking point was the position of Minister-President, a post slated to be filled by the nomination of the Regency Council itself. Kries accused Vienna of attempting to install Adam Tarnowski as Minister-President, an Austro-Hungarian bureaucrat considered by the GGW to be a Trojan horse for the Austro-Polish solution.[555] Berlin regarded him as excessively conservative. Beseler also did not get along with Tarnowski, personally.[556] Beseler, supported by the RAI and the new State Secretary of the Foreign Office, Richard von Kühlmann, prioritized installing a candidate they believed would reliably serve German strategic interests: the former deputy crown marshal of the TRS, Józef Mikułowski-Pomorski.[557] Despite the obvious unacceptability of his candidacy, the incoming members of the Regency Council stubbornly backed Tarnowski. Lubomirski rejected the Pomorski candidacy almost immediately after agreeing to serve, on 21 September, and insisted that Tarnowski represented the only credible option for the Minister-Presidency.[558]

Lubomirski's rejection of the Pomorski candidacy launched a new round of protracted negotiations between the GGW and the incoming Regency Council, further sawing at the already frayed patience of German occupation officials. Lerchenfeld tried to reason with Lubomirski on Beseler's behalf, citing the personal and diplomatic reasons disqualifying Tarnowski from the position. When Lubomirski again refused, Lerchenfeld resorted to threats, noting that the "failure" of the Regency Council under such circumstances might endanger "Polish hopes for a territorial expansion in the East", namely into White Ruthenia.[559] This, Lerchenfeld reported, finally made a "great impression", and Lubomirski promised to discuss the matter with the other

[547] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 160.
[548] Ibid., 184.
[549] Wolfgang von Kries, "Minutes of Telephone Call with Theodor Lewald, 19 September 1917," September 19, 1917, 209, R1501/119712, BArch.
[550] Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Report to the RAI, 13 November 1917," November 13, 1917, 105–6, R1501/119792, BArch.
[551] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Surveillance Report of Political Assembly in Kraków, 28 October 1917," October 30, 1917, 102–3, R1501/119792, BArch.
[552] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Report on the Formation of the Regency Council, 22 September 1917," September 22, 1917, 256, R1501/119712, BArch.
[553] Ibid., 253–54.
[554] von Kries, "Minutes of Telephone Call with Theodor Lewald, 19 September 1917," 209.
[555] Ibid.
[556] v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Report on the Formation of the Regency Council, 22 September 1917," 258.
[557] von Kries, "Minutes of Telephone Call with Theodor Lewald, 19 September 1917," 210.
[558] v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Report on the Formation of the Regency Council, 22 September 1917," 257.
[559] Ibid., 258.

nominees for the Regency Council.[560] On 22 September, however, Ostrowski, Kakowski, and Lubomirski together rejected not only Pomorski, but also the basic conditions the GGW had set for opening the Regency Council, arguing that they did not have the properly constituted authority to "anticipate the results of the international peace negotiations in the Polish question".[561] Refusing to bind the Kingdom of Poland to the Central Powers directly challenged German plans for suzerainty. Threatening to refer the Polish question to an international peace conference was intolerable from Berlin's perspective, as it invited Entente meddling. Moreover, the nominees refused to disclose their selection for a Minister-President prior to their installation into office.[562] Lerchenfeld suspected that Vienna had actively intervened to convince the three to hold out for Tarnowski.[563] A few days later, Kühlmann therefore instructed the German ambassador in Vienna to express Berlin's adamant opposition to the Tarnowski candidacy to the Austro-Hungarian government.[564] The GGW and Regency council both dug in their heels and negotiations dragged for weeks. The RAI and Chancellery both made it expressly clear to Beseler that Berlin would veto Tarnowski if nominated by the Regency Council.[565] The issue was only resolved in November 1917, when a compromise was found in the historian and Jurist, Jan Kucharzewski, who was duly installed as the first Minister-President of the Kingdom of Poland.[566]

After a promising start, the formation of a Regency Council and the selection of a Minister President had only reinforced doubts among German policy-makers that a future Polish government could not be trusted. The vehemence with which the Council nominees pursued a Tarnowski candidacy suggested that Warsaw was uninterested in long-term collaboration with the German Empire, and instead sympathetic towards an Austro-Polish solution. German policy-makers felt spurned, believing that yet another significant political concession on their part had produced neither gratitude nor reciprocity from Warsaw. The whole affair again seemed to suggest that even aristocratic and clerical elites, the GGW's last apparent hope for shaping the political sentiments of the Polish peasantry, were far less pliable to German objectives that previously thought. Coming on the heels of the July mutiny, difficulties in establishing a Polish executive struck a severe blow to German policy-makers' confidence in the long-term reliability and value of a German-Polish union.

Frustration was pronounced and caustic among the upper echelons of the GGW. Gerhard von Mutius, the stalwart proponent of multinationalism, requested a transfer out of GGW service in the late summer of 1917, perhaps out of frustration.[567] Wolfgang von Kries had finally reached the limit of his patience in the fall of 1917. Whether out a sense of professional obligation to Beseler, or because he harbored lingering hopes that a multinationalist strategy might yet be salvaged, Kries had continued to faithfully serve Beseler's policy well after the July mutiny. In early September he had made arrangements to personally distribute propaganda on the occupation's behalf.[568] By the end of September, however, Kries wanted to wash his hands of responsibility for the multinational project in Poland. Kries concluded his final report on developments in German-occupied Poland with an unambiguous evaluation of German prospects in the region. Poland, he believed, "is relatively easy to govern", but only with a "firm hand and a clear will". Going forward, he argued, Germany needed to command the region, rather than trying to strike "deals with Polish elements".[569] Negotiation with Polish nationalists, he implied, had achieved little, and had been read as a sign of weakness rather than generosity. Germany could only achieve is objectives through imposition. On the same day that he submitted his final

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[560] Ibid.
[561] Ibid., 259.
[562] Ibid., 260.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Richard von Kühlmann, "Instructions to Ambassador Botho von Wedel, 26 September 1917," September 26, 1917, 227–33, R1501/119712, BArch.
[565] Karl Helfferich, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 20 October 1917," October 20, 1917, 12, R43/5108, BArch.
[566] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 105.
[567] Wolfgang von Kries, "Letter to the RAI, 3 September 1917," September 3, 1917, 312, R1501/119781, BArch.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Quoted in Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 111.

report, Kries requested leave from the RAI to serve in the Prussian House of Representatives.[570]

The combined effects of the Oath Crisis and frictions with the Regency Council solidified an increasingly negative perception of the Kingdom of Poland for the new Chancellor Michaelis. On 26 October, on Michaelis's initiative, the Chancellery passed along a private memorandum to State Secretary Wallraf, instructing the RAI to pay special attention to its recommendations.[571] The thrust of the memo was that Poles could never be relied upon to collaborate with the German Empire. Polish public opinion remained preponderantly "hostile to Germany", while the truly pro-German collaborators, Studnicki for instance, were vanishingly small in number, unable to exert influence on the broader Polish population, and "discredited" in "all circles".[572] The author concluded that German overtures to Polish nationalists had failed and the "continuation of a policy of concessions along previous lines can not improve this relationship.[573] If Germany were to establish domestic ministries for the Kingdom of Poland, Warsaw would then only demand a War Ministry, then an independent army, and finally complete sovereignty.[574] With complete sovereignty, he finished, they would surely negotiate with the Entente and "conspire" to seize Prussian territory.[575] The author instead recommended fortifying the Prussian border with annexations in Poland, before returning the rest of the region to Russia.[576] Michaelis's heavy-handed endorsement of the memo indicates that he had developed a firm aversion to multinational imperialism over the prior months.

The events of the summer and autumn of 1917 even convinced prominent members of the SPD that multinational union with Poland would be unstable and dangerous. The leadership of the SPD had long tacitly supported the creation of a German-Polish union as a relatively unobtrusive paradigm of imperial expansion, which reinforced Germany's strategic position, improved conditions for Poles, and deeply wounded the Tsarist empire. On 27 September 1917, however, the SPD Reichstag representative Max Cohen developed deeply pessimistic impressions of German imperial policy after touring occupied Poland. He was "convinced" that the "proclamation of 5 November 1916 was the falsest and most disastrous step taken by the Central Powers during the war".[577] Cohen strongly recommended abandoning the present imperial policy, "because we would never win over the Poles. They would always remain the sworn enemies of Germandom, given their national aspirations. They demand ever more, but are never satisfied".[578] There was apparently nobody, Cohen continued, among the Poles sympathetic to the German-Empire, upon whom the occupation could depend for influence.[579] Cohen vowed to oppose the SPD's prior support for the multinationalist project.

In public debates, beleaguered supporters of multinational imperialism once more struggled to explain why Germany should still put its faith in Warsaw, given the new political clashes between the GGW and the Regency Council.[580] Conversely, events in Warsaw only fortified Georg Cleinow's resentment of multinationalist policy. Cleinow had predicted that the newly announced Regency Council would fail to earn either the trust or sympathy of the Poles.[581] By December, Cleinow felt his predictions vindicated, and his prescriptions for securing Germany's strategic objectives in Congress Poland had only radicalized. He argued that Poles had proven, through the "immoderacy of their claims, their myopic egoism, and their national

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[570] Wolfgang von Kries, "Memorandum Submitted to the State Secretary of the RAI, 30 September 1917," September 30, 1917, 77, N30/6, BArch.
[571] Chancellery Press Department, "Letter to State Secretary Max Wallraf, 26 October 1917," October 26, 1917, 341, R1501/119781, BArch.
[572] Steinitzer, "Bericht über eine Studienreise im Generalgouvernement Warschau, 2. Bis 15. Juni 1917," 342–43.
[573] Ibid., 346.
[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid., 346, 355–56.
[576] Ibid., 359–60.
[577] Theodor Lewald, "Internal Memorandum Regarding Max Cohen's Tour of the GGW, 27 September 1917," September 27, 1917, 228, R1501/119791, BArch.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid., 229.
[580] Friedrich Naumann, "Der mitteleuropäische Staatsvertrag," *Mitteleuropa*, no. 14 (October 2, 1917): 859–61.
[581] Cleinow, "Vom polnischen Bauplatz," 385.

vanity", that the creation of a Polish state under German suzerainty offered no realistic value for German security, and indeed only exposed it to treachery from Warsaw.[582] Convinced that a Polish state would inevitably betray the German Empire, he proposed that, however Berlin chose to organize Eastern Europe, it must aggressively prosecute the "struggle of nationalities" in the Prussian *Ostmark* "more ruthlessly" than before the war.[583] In Congress Poland, the German Empire would need to see to its own security, not with the cooperation of Poles, but against them. "After the experiences of the last three years, which only confirm all earlier evil experiences with the Poles, we may not entrust the protection of our Eastern border to the Poles".[584] Germany must establish its own "protective wall" against Poland, made secure through "expulsions" of Polish residents. Germany would need to "evacuate" [*räumen*] a substantial "strip of territory" along the Prussian border, and fortify it through ethnic German colonization.[585] Thus, in little over a year, Cleinow had gone from producing one of the most detailed proposals in support of a German-Polish union, to vocally calling for the annexation and ethnic-cleansing of Polish territory, in response to frustrations in occupied Poland.[586]

Among long-time proponents of nationalizing imperialism, one can also see a shift in the Autumn of 1917. Specifically, interest shifted from focus on the creation of a border-strip along the Prussian-Polish frontier, to support for the far more ambitious program of annexations in the west *and* east of Congress Poland, proposed earlier by figures like Dietrich Schäfer. In 1915, M. Kranz, for instance, had published *Neu-Polen* through the Pan-Germanist Lehmann-Verlag. It had called for the expansion of a new "expanded Ostmark" through annexations and population exchanges in Congress Poland.[587] By 1917, Kranz had expanded his vision, and now demanded annexing a second band of territory to the east of Congress Poland, one that would sever a rump Polish state from potential military collaboration with a future Russian state. This, he believed would be a far better "bulwark of West European culture against half-Asiatic barbarism" than a Polish state ever would.[588]

The challenges of mid-1917 also appear to have convinced German fence-sitters to adopt more antagonistic strategies towards Poland. Erich Brandenburg, a Leipzig Professor, had offered a memorandum to Berlin in early 1917 in support of the annexation and Germanization of the Baltic provinces. However, he rejected the idea of annexing a Polish border strip, arguing that the borders of the new Kingdom of Poland should be left unchanged with the exception of Suwałki.[589] In August 1917, however, he published a new article in *Die Ostmark* advocating the annexation of a border-strip and the abandonment of state-building efforts.[590] It was probably not coincidental that Brandenburg's opinion changed so soon after the July mutiny.

Retreat from Multinational Imperialism in Eastern Europe, July-December 1917

The extended crisis in official confidence in multinational imperialism that began with the July

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[582] Cleinow, "Friedenszurüstungen," 261.
[583] Ibid., 260.
[584] Ibid., 261.
[585] Ibid. Notably, Cleinow explicitly exempted Jewish residents from expulsion. Cleinow did not consider Congress Poland's large Jewish minority especially threatening to the German Empire. His endorsement of ethnic cleansing was a policy of ethnic management which aimed to expunge the threat of Polish irredentism. Violent anti-Semitism and proposals for Ethnic Cleansing directed against ethnic Poles have been routinely conflated in historiography. This is understandable, as there was considerable overlap between anti-Semites and proponents of nationalizing imperialism, especially visible in the Pan-German League. However anti-Semitism did not generally motivate proposals for purging a border-strip of its Polish residents, nor did proponents of annexations and ethnic-cleansing necessarily have any animus towards Eastern European Jews.
[586] Geiss incorrectly states that Cleinow had supported a nationalized border-strip from the beginning of the war, and that his December 1917 program largely reflected his earlier stances. This of course ignores Cleinow's work for the GGW and his active support of a German-Polish union in 1915-1916. Geiss also attributes any hardening of attitudes by Cleinow to a vague "War-psychosis", missing that his policies changed according to his interpretation of Germany's occupation experience. Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 58–60.
[587] Ibid., 52.
[588] Quoted in Ibid.
[589] Ibid., 60.
[590] Ibid., 62.

mutiny promulgated substantial and lasting changes to German imperial strategy, both in Poland itself and for Eastern Europe more broadly. Increasingly concerned that the Kingdom of Poland could not be controlled, that it might resist, or even betray the German Empire, military and civilian policy-makers shifted focus away from bargaining to enlist the collaboration of Polish nationalists in pursuit of shared objectives. They instead developed new tactics and plans to rule, suppress, and contain the Polish state. Three particular strategies were considered and endorsed by a growing list of German officials and imperial agencies. First, large annexations of Polish-territory along the Prussian border, once thought by most inimical to multinational imperialism, were now increasingly considered indispensible to secure the German Empire from potential Varsovian treachery. German military and civilian leaders therefore tended to endorse larger annexations and were more willing to consider Germanization to fortify these regions from Polish irredentism. Second, support for a militarily capable and large Polish state diminished considerably and many policy-makers began opposing the extension of Poland eastward, into White Ruthenia or vilna. Third, a growing body of civilian policy-makers finally joined the OHL in support of militarily containing the Kingdom of Poland, either by annexing a new wall of territory east of Poland directly to Prussia or by balancing Poland with a new cohort of rival states. All three of these strategies abandoned the collaborative roots of multinational imperialism, wherein an autonomous Polish state and a German Empire would defend and reinforce one another through collaboration. They instead aimed to cripple a troublesome and potentially dangerous Polish state that German imperialists regretted being saddled with. At the nadir of German-Polish relations, Berlin even abandoned its plans to establish a German-Polish union altogether. This shift in policy was short-lived, but nonetheless revealed the widespread and deep distrust of Polish statehood among German military and civilian leaders. Other alterations in German imperial policy towards Poland proved more permanent, and remained on Berlin's agenda until the end of the war.

Any potential changes to imperial policy in Poland were limited by political realities in Berlin. On 19 July the Center, FVP, and MSPD had passed a resolution calling for a negotiated peace without annexations. This should not be interpreted as a renunciation of multinational policy in Poland by its prior advocates in the FVP and Center. The formulation of peace without annexations was deliberately ambiguous, leaving just enough room for interpretation to permit for a German-Polish union.[591] Even Erzberger, who had helped promulgate the Peace Resolution continued to support multinational union with Poland as one of the German Empire's central objectives for the war.[592] In August Erzberger, Naumann, and Gothein, along with David and Scheidemann from the MSPD, together sponsored a bill calling on the government to fulfill the promises of 5 November through the creation of Polish ministries and the transformation of the TRS into a prototype assembly.[593] The Reichstag therefore held Berlin to the 5 November proclamation as the basic framework for reorganizing Polish space.

German military and civilian officials remained generally committed to establishing a German-Polish union as the centerpiece of imperial policy in Eastern Europe. The Chancellery and OHL gathered at Kreuznach on 9 August 1917 to confer on plans for Eastern Europe. They were clearly concerned about the restive state of Poland, and the OHL and Chancellery tellingly revisited the possibility of an Austro-Polish solution. Participants agreed that Germany was politically "bound" to the proclamation made on the 5 November 1916, a framework which would permit an Austro-Polish solution or a German-Polish union.[594] For familiar reasons they again concluded that Austro-trialism was a worse alternative.[595] With apparent reluctance, the gathered parties opted to continue building the Kingdom of Poland with the intention of legally incorporating it under German suzerainty. Indeed, they hoped to pursue this policy more

[591] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 396.
[592] Ibid., 403.
[593] Matthias Erzberger et al., "Proposed Reichstag Bill, Nr. 561, 13th Legislative Period, 2nd Session," August 27, 1917, 2, R1501/119673, BArch.
[594] Reichskanzlei, "Protocol of Conference Btween the Imperial Chancellor and OHL, Kreuznach," August 9, 1917, 26, R43/2477, BArch.
[595] Ibid.

aggressively, and stressed the urgent necessity of Austria's divestment from the region, the unification of the GGL and GGW, and the immediate installation of Beseler's most recent candidate for the Regency, Duke Albrecht of Württemberg. Though unrest in Poland had briefly tempted German policy-makers to hand over Poland to Austria, the OHL and Michaelis concluded that a stable German-Polish union remained possible, and therefore strategically preferable to Austro-Hungarian expansion.

German negotiators therefore hounded the Austro-Hungarian representatives throughout August, pestering them to clear the way for German suzerainty in Poland. When representatives of the two empires gathered in Berlin on 14 August, German negotiators indicated that they would be unwilling to end the war without resolving the Polish question.[596] Chancellor Michaelis openly accused Vienna of acting in bad faith and failing to divest itself from Poland.[597] He referred to the concerns of GGW officials that Austria was using its position in the GGL to subvert Germany's efforts in Poland, especially through a permissive censorship policy. Michaelis refused to entertain any of Czernin's excuses. "If we do not receive Poland completely in the hand," Michaelis promised, "then we will take just as much as we need in Poland and give the remainder to Russia."[598] In a note to Czernin on 17 August he affirmed his commitment to a German-Polish union and his demand for Austrian divestment in more diplomatic language.[599] On the same day, Undersecretary Lewald met with the conservative Polish representative Adam Ronikier in Berlin to hash out a strategy for shoring up the popular legitimacy of the Polish government.[600] Lewald secured Ronikier's agreement that Poland's activist parties would renew their support for the creation of a Polish army and its deployment against Russia, and that they would tolerate the cession of Suwałki and part of Łomża to the German Empire.[601]

Still, the palpable disenchantment of German policy-makers with multinational imperialism was evident in their sudden willingness to either prepare acceptable contingency plans for the potential failure of a German-Polish union or even reconsider plans for union altogether. On the possibility of a Polish satellite state under German leadership, Michaelis wondered openly "whether this development will grow into a real advantage for Germany, or if it could mature into a great danger for the future, [a possibility] for which several indications already exist".[602] Michaelis expressed serious concerns about the "danger, which an unwillingly-attached Poland would present to Germany".[603] Indeed Michaelis had already begun to explore contingencies. On 1 August he had met with Austro-Hungarian representatives, suggesting that if Germany was ultimately unable to win Polish support for a German-Polish union, Berlin might again consider annexing large parts of Congress Poland and then permitting an Austro-trialist solution.[604] On 17 August Michaelis went further, telling Czernin that, given deep concerns about the potential resistance of a Polish state, the Chancellery was effectively reconsidering all of its options in Poland. After taking any necessary "border-territories", Germany might simply return the rest of Poland to Russia, or even permit its complete independence.[605]

A sudden interest in contingency planning is also evident in internal discussions of Polish policy. On 9 August, the possibility of abandoning multinational imperialism was raised at Kreuznach. Discussion on this point revolved entirely around the prospects of future Polish collaboration and the likelihood of long-term resistance.

> If the Poles should refuse [to collaborate], so may one only let it come to a fourth

[596] Chancellery, "Minutes of Berlin Conference, 14 August 1917," August 14, 1917, 35, R43/2477, BArch.
[597] Ibid., 29–31.
[598] Ibid., 32–33.
[599] Georg Michaelis, "Letter from Chancellor Michaelis to Imperial Foreign Minister Czernin," August 17, 1917, 38–39, R43/2477, BArch.
[600] Theodor Lewald, "Internal Report on Discussions with Count Ronikier, 17 August 1917," August 17, 1917, 316, R1501/119712, BArch.
[601] Ibid., 316–17.
[602] Michaelis, "Letter from Chancellor Michaelis to Imperial Foreign Minister Czernin," 39.
[603] Ibid.
[604] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 123.
[605] Michaelis, "Letter from Chancellor Michaelis to Imperial Foreign Minister Czernin," 39.

> partition of Poland. The border corrections must afterwards be more extensive (the entire Narew Line!) than those under the hitherto foreseen assumption of a Poland dependent upon Germany.[606]

Although the OHL and Michaelis had not yet given up on multinational imperialism, support in Berlin was hanging by a thread. Beseler's policy had gained traction in the prior year and a half through the argument that further annexations in polish territory would only incense the Polish nationalist movement and undermine German security. However, the recent experiences of the student strike and oath crisis now suggested to observers that national unrest was unavoidable even with relatively generous policies of autonomy. More disciplinary forms of German rule based on the direct application of power and the repression of Polish autonomy, began to garner support as the only realistic and effective means of safeguarding the border.

For some Germans, the apparent threat posed by a Polish state in the wake of the July mutiny warranted more extensive annexations along the Prussian border, even if Poland were formally integrated in political and military union with the German Empire. While even Beseler had long supported limited annexations in the North of Congress Poland, the GGW remained officially opposed to western annexations, believing them militarily superfluous, and more likely to destabilize a German-Polish union than achieve anything meaningful.[607] In the wake of the Oath Crisis, however, Ludendorff and the OHL made a forceful case that Poland could no longer by trusted with the military security of Germany's eastern border. In a letter to the Chancellor on 15 August, Ludendorff again proposed new minimum demands for territory in Congress Poland. In September the OHL repeated that Germany's security would henceforth require annexations along Poland's western border, especially around the industrial region of Upper-Silesia.[608] On 7 September, Ludendorff further encouraged the Prussian War Minister to support the OHL's renewed overtures for Hindenburg's more extensive annexationist demands articulated in December 1916.[609] Stein ultimately agreed with the OHL's position, and on 1 October, he denounced the GGW's singular reliance upon suzerainty over Poland for the German Empire's future security. He thereafter demanded annexations in western Poland as the minimal "sufficient military security for the Upper-Silesian industrial region".[610] Ludendorff now also pressed for the "Germanization of the border-strip" to ensure the lasting security of this region from Polish revolt or subversion.[611] Though still hoping to incorporate the entire autonomous Polish state into a German imperial structure, Ludendorff pressed more forcefully for an ethnically-fortified strip of annexations to guarantee Germany's security from Poland.

German military and civilian leaders also increasingly insisted on hobbling the Polish state militarily. Support for a militarily capable allied Kingdom of Poland augmented by territory in White Ruthenia crumbled, replaced by proposals for a small and manageable Polish state. The OHL had opposed the eastward extension of Poland for months, in part because they feared the diminution of their power in Ober Ost. But the OHL had generally offered vague justifications that failed to sway other imperial officials or agencies. Beseler, in contrast, had successfully advocated a large and militarily strong Poland, reinforced through eastward expansion, under the assumption that it would reliably defend its German suzerain. Until the summer of 1917, both the Monarchy and Chancellery regularly backed Beseler's program. Following the July mutiny, however, the OHL more vigorously opposed Polish enlargement on the grounds that it reinforced a potentially hostile foreign power. With doubts about Polish reliability growing in government circles, these arguments enjoyed considerably more resonance than before.

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[606] Reichskanzlei, "Protocol of Conference Btween the Imperial Chancellor and OHL, Kreuznach," 26.
[607] Hermann von Stein, "Letter to Chancellor Michaelis, 1 October 1917," October 1, 1917, 118, R1501/119823, BArch.
[608] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to War Minister von Stein, 7 September 1917," September 7, 1917, 120, R1501/119823, BArch.
[609] Ibid.
[610] von Stein, "Letter to Chancellor Michaelis, 1 October 1917," 118.
[611] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Chancellor Michaelis, 15 August 1917," August 15, 1917, 113, R1501/119823, BArch.

The issue was first raised in reference to Polish claims over the territory around Vilnius. OHL and Foreign Office representatives convened on 31 July 1917 to discuss the reorganization of the Baltics. The OHL and other military leaders sharply opposed transferring Vilna to Poland, specifically because the Polish state represented a latent threat to Germany. In the wake of the Oath Crisis, attendees now insisted that Vilna must "never come to the Kingdom of Poland on military grounds".[612] Nobody at the conference raised objections to this line of reasoning, including the representatives of the Foreign Office. Representatives of the OHL pressed this point when they gathered with Chancellor Michaelis at Kreuznach on 9 August 1917. The OHL again insisted that the transfer of Vilna to the emergent Polish state was "militarily impermissible".[613] Chancellor Michaelis apparently agreed, or at least raised no objections to the issue. In a 4 September letter to Michaelis, Ludendorff insisted that, "Poland will, so again teaches the present arrogant attitude of the Poles, only give [us] peace, if we keep it in check through extensive restrictions" and therefore could be awarded neither Grodno nor Vilna.[614]

At the nadir of German-Polish relations in 1917, as a Polish state under German suzerainty appeared increasingly dangerous, military and civilian leaders even seriously contemplated abandoning plans for a German-Polish union. In September, Kaiser Wilhelm II began to regard influence over Romania as a tempting prize. After returning from a tour of occupied Romanian territory, the Kaiser gushed that the oil-rich region had the potential to develop into Germany's "greatest source of wealth". He argued that achieving economic influence in the region appeared much easier than stabilizing suzerainty over a "hysterical Poland", where, it seemed, the differences between Germans and Poles were just to great to build a collaborative and productive strategic relationship.[615] The Kaiser therefore suggested abandoning plans for a German-Polish union and trading supremacy in Poland to Vienna for large annexations along the Prussian border and a free hand in Romania.[616]

On 7 October, the *Reichsleitung* and OHL again gathered at Kreuznach, in part to reconcile and recalibrate Germany's imperial plans for Eastern Europe in light of the Kaiser's suggestion.[617] Kühlmann offered the Foreign Office's support for the return to an Austro-Polish solution, especially in light of Poles' obvious and ongoing reluctance to cooperate with the German Empire.[618] Despite their deep distrust for Poland, however, Ludendorff and Hindenburg opposed handing over Poland to Austria-Hungary.[619] While they suspected the possibility of a Polish-state conspiring with foreign powers to betray the German Empire, they still did not want Congress Poland to function as an Austro-Hungarian salient, poking northward into German territory. Should relations with Vienna deteriorate, the OHL did not want Austro-Hungarian troops to be able to quickly surround Silesia. If the German Empire were to adopt an Austro-Polish solution, they argued, Germany would require a very substantial strip of Polish territory to ensure its security.[620]

Having received word that an Austro-Polish solution was back on the table, Beseler framed his 13 October 1917 biannual report to the Kaiser as a desperate plea to instead continue efforts to establish a stable German-Polish union. Beseler knew that sympathy for multinational imperialism had decayed considerably. He conceded that "aversion" to multinational imperialism was "widespread" in Germany, premised on the belief in the "irreconcilability of the German and

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[612] Chancellery, "Protocol of Conference in Supreme Headquarters, 31 July 1917," July 31, 1917, 21, R43/2477, BArch.
[613] Reichskanzlei, "Protocol of Conference Btween the Imperial Chancellor and OHL, Kreuznach," 25.
[614] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Chancellor Michaelis, 4 September 1917," September 4, 1917, 292, R1501/119712, BArch.
[615] Quoted in Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity*, 251.
[616] Ibid. Fischer ascribes this interest in Romania to largely economic motives, largely ignoring the broader context of military and *Reichsleitung* disenchantment with the prospect of Polish collaboration. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 434.
[617] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 435.
[618] Ibid.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid., 436.

Polish natures".[621] Beseler admitted that the resistance of Polish nationalists, and the lack of cooperation from the wider population could be discouraging. As difficult as the situation in occupied-Poland was, Beseler insisted that the occupation could still establish a stable German-Polish union, that Poles would come to recognize the advantages of multinational union for their own security, and that this would be the most efficient means of fortifying Germany's position in Eastern Europe.[622] He struggled to minimize the relevance of the Oath Crisis. "The resignation of the Provisional Council of State," he wrote, "has brought no, or at least no fundamental delay to the slow, but constantly progressing inner organization of the country".[623] He considered the mutiny and subsequent mass resignation theatrical nationalist gestures that would ultimately fail to undermine structural changes which would support a German-Polish reconciliation. "All previous real and purported failures and blunders" he argued, had still not precluded Germany's eventual success in its "main idea".[624] He insisted that, after establishing a German-Polish union, "the idea of mortal enmity and irreconcilability of the Germans and Poles will gradually diminish before the recognition of common economic and cultural interests…".[625] Beseler noted happy that transitional authorities had continued to work with the occupation after the resignation of the TRS, and that large segments of public opinion seemed satisfied with the Regency Council and its new ministries, which they regarded as the "incarnation of a real Polish government.[626]

So long as it remained plausible that a Polish state would reliably fight alongside the German Empire in the future, Beseler considered multinational imperialism Germany's best strategic option. Only German suzerainty, he explained, would allow Berlin to erect an effective defensive line against Russia while taming the threat of Polish irredentism.[627] Contrary to the rising opposition from the OHL, Beseler even continued to advocate the eastward expansion of Poland into White Ruthenia.[628] He also remained opposed to large western annexations, believing these would permanently scuttle remaining Polish sympathy for the German Empire.[629]

However, Beseler's stubborn faith in the continuing plausibility of multinational union papered over a recent shift in his own understanding of political sentiment in occupied Poland. Acknowledging that few Poles actually wanted German suzerainty was nothing new. But Beseler had previously described the Polish political landscape as fractured between Russian loyalists, Austrophiles, supporters of independence, German sympathizers, and a host of largely apathetic civilians simply trying to survive the war. Beseler now admitted that this evaluation of Polish national sentiment was no longer valid. Most Poles, Beseler conceded, wanted a completely independent Polish state with unqualified sovereignty, and he worried that the majority also hoped to reunite most, if not all of, the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under Warsaw's rule, including Belarus, the Baltics, Galicia, the Prussian *Ostmark*, and Kiev.[630] The "most moderate" of Polish movements, who would accept "limitations of Polish independence" and union with the German Empire, were far less popular and influential.[631]

That the leading proponent of multinational imperialism in the German imperial government now believed the majority of Congress Poles to favor sovereignty, and suspected them of harboring hostile irredentist ambitions, says much about the state of German confidence in multinationalism at this particular moment. To German observers in the autumn of 1917, all of the GGW's previous assumptions about Polish politics appeared false. The Polish political landscape no longer appeared fractured and malleable, but rather united in its insistence on independence, and therefore opposition to German suzerainty. Greater-Polish nationalism no

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[621] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte, 13 April 1917," 141.
[622] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 13 October 1917," 179–80.
[623] Ibid., 181.
[624] Ibid., 180.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Ibid., 181.
[627] Ibid., 180.
[628] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Ziel unserer Politik in Polen, Vortrag Kurhaus Kreuznach," June 14, 1917, 182, N30/14, BArch.
[629] von Beseler, "Immediatberichte des Generalgouverneurs in Warschau, 13 October 1917," 179.
[630] Ibid., 178–79.
[631] Ibid., 179.

longer seemed like a fringe romantic movement of intellectuals and socially-displaced youth, but rather the shared vision of the Polish nation. The Polish masses seemed far less susceptible to German influence than Beseler had anticipated. Paired with the mounting disaffection of GGW officials with their ability to wield reliable Polish elites to shape mass sentiment, the GGW's credible options for building sympathy among the occupied population seemed far narrower than in 1916. Going forward, Beseler essentially wagered everything on habituation and mutual advantage. That is, he hoped that, once established, a German-Polish union would gradually prove its strategic value to Polish observers, while restraint from intervention in Warsaw's domestic sphere would eventually relax Polish fears of German chicanery.

But after almost year of setbacks, civilian leaders and agencies in Berlin were more inclined to question Beseler's judgment. Despite Beseler's pleas, the imperial leadership continued to explore a Polish-Romanian trade with Austria-Hungary. On 22 October, Kühlmann hashed out a set of non-binding principles with Czernin to guide future negotiations.[632] The Kingdom of Poland would be incorporated into the Habsburg Empire, either via trialism or personal union in exchange for German influence in Romania. Kühlmann even managed to secure promises of continuing German influence over military and economic affairs in Poland.[633]

Mounting discontent among policy-makers over the future of German imperial policy in Poland boiled over in meetings held in Berlin over 3-5 November 1917. Vice-Chancellor, Helfferich, chaired the 3 November conference, held in the Foreign Office. After a brief and ineffectual tenure, the Kaiser had replaced Chancellor Michaelis in late October with Georg von Hertling, a former leader of the Center Party and current Minister-President of Bavaria. Hertling had long defended Germany's federalist constitution.[634] In the early years of the war he had opposed annexing large segments of Polish territory and had initially favored an Austro-Polish solution.[635] In the meetings of early November, the fresh Chancellor took a reserved attitude and allowed other officials, more closely acquainted with the intricacies of Polish policy, to debate the matter. His State Secretary of the RAI, Max Wallraf, and his State Secretary of the Foreign Office, Richard von Kühlmann, also attended. Hindenburg and Ludendorff represented the OHL. Beseler and Kries personally attended the conference for the GGW. The Vice-President of the Prussian *Staatsministerium*, Breitenbach, and Interior Minister Drews stood for the interests of Prussia. The Prussian War Minister also attended the conference.[636]

Although the German-Polish solution was technically retained as the preferred option for the future, the proceedings of the conference revealed the deep skepticism, which had grown in the imperial leadership over the past year. During the two-day meeting, several participants expressed pointed disbelief with the possibility of any future reconciliation with Polish nationalism. In light of their deep mistrust of Polish intentions, gathered officials reached a tense agreement that every possible measure to constrain the power of the emerging Polish state would be adopted. German leaders resolved to reduce the scope of Poland's future strategic resources and to diplomatically contain Warsaw. Within a year, Germany's official Polish policy had shifted dramatically, but not because of the growing weight of the OHL in political decision-making. The conference minutes reveal that both military and civilian camps were split in their views of Poland. Rather optimism that an Poland would willingly serve as a junior partner for Central European security in the East had now all but disappeared, undermined by a growing

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[632] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 437.
[633] Ibid.
[634] Georg von Hertling, "Hertling an Lerchenfeld, 14 August 1915," in *Briefwechsel Hertling-Lerchenfeld, 1912-1917: Dienstliche Privatkorrespondenz zwischen dem bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Georg Graf von Hertling und dem bayerischen Gesandten in Berlin Hugo Graf von und zu Lerchenfeld*, ed. Ernst Deuerlein, vol. 1 (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1973), 515.
[635] Georg von Hertling, "Hertling an Lerchenfeld, 19 August 1915," in *Briefwechsel Hertling-Lerchenfeld, 1912-1917: Dienstliche Privatkorrespondenz zwischen dem bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Georg Graf von Hertling und dem bayerischen Gesandten in Berlin Hugo Graf von und zu Lerchenfeld*, ed. Ernst Deuerlein, vol. 1 (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1973), 518.
[636] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," November 3, 1917, 33, N30/15, BArch.

assumption that Polish nationalism was intrinsically hostile to the German Empire.[637]

Kühlmann opened the meeting by emphasizing that the "further formation of Poland" and "its relationship to Germany and Austria" represented the "most important question of the World War".[638] He then cut to the heart of the matter, expressing doubt over multinationalist policy. He distanced the current government from the policy, ascribing responsibility for Polish statehood to the now canned Bethmann Hollweg, and added that proper "judgment" regarding the wisdom of this controversial decision would need to be left to future historians.[639] Without the announcement of Polish statehood, Kühlmann complained, present policy decisions "would be easier and lighter". Already the Foreign Office leader implied that multinationalist policy had been a severe error, but one which now "lay like a boulder in the road".[640]

Beseler was therefore on the defensive from the beginning of the meeting. He continued to plead for patience from his colleagues and offered an optimistic portrayal of Germany's future prospects in Poland. The Governor-General again insisted that a German-Polish union represented the best prospect for building an effective "defensive-line against Russia", whose revival as a great power was inevitable.[641]

But even Beseler could only present a qualified defense of multinationalist policy, one which recognized daunting obstacles to future success. Referring to the recruitment crisis and the July munity, Beseler admitted that the "formation of the Polish army has failed".[642] He further conceded that, for the moment, "Poles do not want an attachment to Germany".[643] He explained that Poland was a "sick nation", which had developed an "exaggerated" nationalist discourse after more than a century of Russian political repression.[644] Still, Beseler argued that Polish nationalist hostility to Germany could be overcome.

> One should also not regard the Poles as our enemies for all eternity. I am familiar with the hostility of the Poles, but I believe that a reconciliation could be achieved through patient and protracted work.[645]

Despite recent difficulties in establishing the Regency council, Beseler assured his colleagues that its members understood Berlin's goal of establishing suzerainty over Poland, that they would accept this demand, and that they would maneuver to build support for a German-Polish union among the Polish population.[646] Beseler argued he was on the brink of success in Poland, and that the creation of the Regency Council had won significant trust among Poles.[647] He further claimed that many of Poland's "truly serious and intelligent" elites no longer indulged "dangerous"

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[637] Fischer noted the policy changes implemented at these conferences, but did not relate any of the decisions reached at the conference to shifting views of ethnic management within the *Reichsleitung*, GGW, or OHL. Rather, he attributed them to the growing influence of the OHL in German imperial policy. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 439–41. The minutes of the conferences, do not support this interpretation (see below). The OHL was split on the matter. While Ludendorff actually offered tentative support for continuing the multinational project, Hindenburg wanted to abandon efforts to build a German Polish union. Some of the most venomous criticism of multinational imperialism also came from civilian policy-makers. Fischer also erroneously states that policies to encircle Poland by annexing territories to its East were adopted in the spring of 1917, thus showing that Berlin had always intended to establish a hobbled rump Poland. Though this policy was considered, it had not been adopted as German policy for any significant period before July 1917. Fischer ignores the ongoing support of the GGW, many civilian agencies, and even the Kaiser, for expanding Poland eastward into White Ruthenia.

[638] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 33.

[639] Ibid.

[640] Ibid.

[641] Ibid., 35–36.

[642] Ibid., 38.

[643] Ibid., 40.

[644] Ibid., 35–38.

[645] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," November 4, 1917, 51, R43/2477, BArch.

[646] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 35.

[647] Ibid.

fantasies of greater-Polish nationalism.[648] Poles, Beseler continued, certainly didn't love the German Empire, but they hated and feared the possibility of Russification more, and would loyally fight alongside the German Empire in a future war.[649] Sympathy for "union [*Anscluss*] with Germany" grew "more and more" and Beseler concluded that Germany could win "Poland within 2-3 Generations" if it persisted in its current gradualist policy.[650]

Beseler's staunch support for creating a German-Polish union found only qualified and unenthusiastic support from some participants. Despite his own personal disaffection with multinationalist policy and his recent decision to leave the GGW, Kries did his professional duty and stood up for Beseler's policy.[651] Beseler also found an uneasy ally in Ludendorff. While the Quartermaster General doubted the eventual success and stability of a German-Polish union, he saw no advantage to abandoning the project now. He noted that the GGW still retained control of the Polish army, and that it therefore might succeed in establishing suzerainty over Warsaw.[652] "We must have absolute political, military, and economic hegemony in Poland," Ludendorff argued, and he believed that a multinational German-Polish union still represented the best prospect of achieving this at the lowest cost.[653] Breitenbach also endorsed continued fidelity to a multinationalist agenda, though he saw it as the least of all evils, and believed that changing German policy now would probably severely destabilize the region.[654] Drews also noted that he would be willing to support continued efforts towards a German-Polish union, but only if the Polish state could be made so dependent upon, and vulnerable to, the Germany Empire that they could not feasibly resist German hegemony.[655]

This uncomfortable and wavering faction of multinationalists faced staunch opposition from their colleagues, who argued that Polish behavior had revealed that Germany could not trust a Polish state to reliably defend its own interests in the future. Hindenburg cut his partner Ludendorff off at the knee, claiming that "The enmity of Poland has always existed in history".[656] Hindenburg tried to wash his hands of what he considered a distasteful policy, and he already tried to refute the "legend, widespread in Berlin, that the Supreme Army Command had created the Kingdom of Poland".[657] He attempted to exonerate himself in particular, insisting that he and Ludendorff had been misled by promises of hordes of Polish enlistees.[658] Incensed that these had not arrived, and convinced that a Polish state would organize armed resistance against the German Empire, Hindenburg declared his disapproval of continued efforts to build an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty.[659]

Kühlmann mounted a frontal assault on multinationalism, contesting its central assumption. The disquieting experiences of the past year, he argued, had demonstrated that "a sincere, beneficial cooperation is not possible because of the insurmountable aversion of the Poles for German suzerainty".[660] "Only *one* solution [to the Polish question] is never possible, that is the German: for the simple reason, because the Poles do not want it".[661] Kühlmann felt that the

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[648] Ibid., 39.
[649] Ibid., 36, 41.
[650] Ibid., 36.
[651] Ibid., 39.
[652] Ibid., 38.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Ibid., 39.
[655] Ibid., 42.
[656] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 51.
[657] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 37. Technically he was correct. The OHL had not promulgated multinationalist policy, nor had it led efforts to initiate the project. Falkenhayn, however, had been an early and influential supporter of multinationalism and the Deputy General Staff had produced one of the first detailed studies in favor of a German-Polish union.
[658] Ibid. This is also a mischaracterization. Both men had supported the creation of a Polish state despite explicit caveats that an army might not be ready before the war's conclusion. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had yet supported a proposed German-Polish union under the conviction that it represented Germany's best long-term strategic option. See above.
[659] Ibid.
[660] Ibid., 33.
[661] Ibid., 39.

July mutiny and other political conflicts pointed to the inescapable conclusion that Poles would invariably work to subvert German imperial security. He attacked his colleagues for what he considered a reckless act of self-delusion. To Beseler he sarcastically asked, "Does the Governor General believe that German and Polish officers will work together successfully?"[662] Kühlmann even dressed down Ludendorff, asking if the "reliability of the Poles against Russia" could actually be guaranteed, "even under German leadership".[663] To both, he answered no:

> All this seems impossible to me, and I come to the conclusion, that our border is therefore only truly secured, if German corps perform our border defense. Therefore, in order to secure borders, Polish territories must be separated under all circumstances…[664]

Distrusting the Warsaw's loyalties, Kühlmann therefore concluded that Germany would need to defend itself from Polish treachery in the future. Annexations along the Polish frontier would be necessary whether or not Berlin achieved formal suzerainty over the Kingdom of Poland.

The offices surrounding the Chancellery had become deeply skeptical of a German-Polish union since July. The newly installed State Secretary of the RAI, Max Wallraf, offered similarly uncompromising opposition to multinational imperialism. He claimed that the "reports of his own advisors [*Referenten*]", as well as those from sympathetic Poles, confirmed the deep opposition of Poles to German leadership.[665] The national characters of Poland and Germany, Wallraf argued, were incompatible by disposition, making collaboration impossible in the long run.[666] Karl Helfferich, now Vice-Chancellor, abandoned his prior support for a German-Polish union as a result of the experiences of 1917. He too believed that Warsaw would inevitably turn the guns of the Polish army on its German suzerain.

> Despite the great antipathy of the Poles against us, can we expect in this state a buttress for us in the future? We can *never* give that, which the Poles want from us. Therefore, pressure on their part against us is a necessity.[667]

Helfferich later clarified his meaning. He stated bluntly that a "German-Polish" solution was unthinkable, because Poles would never consider their interests coterminous with the German Empire, or accept common cause with Berlin.[668]

The participants of the conference also reopened debate over the Austro-Polish solution. Kühlmann, believing that Poles would doggedly resist German suzerainty, but unwilling to return Poland to Russia, argued that an Austro-Polish solution offered the only reasonable chance of stabilizing the region under allied control.[669] Kühlmann acknowledged the danger that Polish irredentism might animate Austria-Hungary against the German Empire. However, he considered the threat of Polish irredentism inevitable, and believed that Austrian rule offered the best chance for quieting nationalist activity in Poland.[670] Wallraf and Helfferich generally agreed with Kühlmann's logic, though both preferred to return most of Congress Poland to Russia. Still, they accepted the Austro-Polish solution as preferable to German suzerainty.[671]

Beseler was appalled. Noting the apparent weakness and incompetence of the Austro-Hungarian military, Beseler stated that Berlin could not hand such a strategically vital territory to

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[662] Ibid., 40.
[663] Ibid.
[664] Ibid.
[665] Ibid., 34.
[666] Ibid.
[667] Ibid., 38.
[668] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Minutes of the Crown Council Meeting in Bellevue Palace, 5 November 1917," November 5, 1917, 81, N30/24, BArch.
[669] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 33.
[670] Ibid., 39.
[671] Ibid., 34, 38.

Vienna.[672] He further warned that an Austro-Polish solution would not reduce the threat of Polish betrayal. Instead of a Polish army, Beseler argued, Germany risked fighting the combined weight of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[673] Ludendorff again sided with Beseler, agreeing that a Polish state under Vienna's control would, at best, be an unreliable and inadequate shield of the German frontier. Just as likely, nationalist agitators would use Austrian-controlled Poland as a base of operations as they subverted Prussian rule over the *Ostmark*.[674] Though Hindenburg opposed a German-Polish union, he too sided with Beseler and Ludendorff against an Austro-Polish solution, fearing that it would reinvigorate the Austro-Hungarian Empire, possibly even reviving the Habsburgs as a credible rival of the German Empire in Central Europe.[675]

Hertling ultimately refused to make any final decision on Germany's basic objectives in Poland. New to the Chancellorship, he wanted more time to digest an issue of such consequence.[676] Nonetheless, that the Austro-Polish solution had even been seriously revisited, finding vocal support among key imperial offices, signaled the severe loss of faith in the policy that Berlin had hitherto been pursuing. The conference even went so far as to sketch principles for adopting an Austro-Polish solution, should Hertling decide on this course. Participants reached the "consensus" that Germany had the "greatest interest" in insuring that any possible bond between Austria and Poland should be as "loose as possible", i.e. a personal union without a binding constitutional arrangement.[677] Participants hoped to trade Poland for freedom to pursue its preferred solutions in the Baltic regions, as well as a free hand in Romania.[678] Kühlmann also hoped Berlin could establish some degree of influence over Vienna, and therefore Poland by proxy.[679] But nobody at the table that day seriously intended an Austro-Polish solution to shield Germany's eastern frontier. Its supporters only wanted Vienna to contain the Polish state and Polish nationalism, and prevent the spillover of nationalist unrest into the *Ostmark.* German security against Russia would instead be secured via annexations to the East and West of Congress Poland.

At the same conference, imperial leadership uncoupled the issue of border rectifications from the question of Germany's future relationship with Poland. Throughout the war, the extent of proposed alterations to Germany's eastern frontier had generally been inversely proportional to imperialists' confidence in Berlin's ability to otherwise secure its influence in Congress Poland. Leaders like Beseler had generally agreed that successfully erecting German suzerainty over a new Kingdom of Poland would necessitate only minor border rectifications at key locations. Within a stable German-Polish union, border rectifications made little strategic sense, as the Kingdom of Poland would function as a military extension of the German Empire.

After the events of the summer, however, planners in Berlin sought to backstop the German-Polish union against Polish treachery. Minutes from the conference record a strong consensus on this matter:

> According to the preponderant outlook of the participants, the fortification of the borders of the German empire against Poland will need to be essentially the same,

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[672] Ibid., 36. Beseler affected a surprised demeanor, but some of this shock was certainly feigned. In a subsequent letter to the new Chancellor, Beseler would attempt to explain his isolation at the 3 November conference through less than honest means. Specifically, he claimed that he had been cut out of imperial policy-making since July 1917, and had therefore been caught off-guard by Austro-Polish demands. This was perhaps half-true. Beseler may have been marginalized since the Oath Crisis, but he had known about renewed German interest in an Austro-Polish solution since at least mid-October. He therefore had at least some opportunity, to try to persuade other civilian officials. Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 12 November 1917," November 12, 1917, 58, N30/15, BArch.

[673] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 43.

[674] Ibid., 37–38.

[675] Ibid., 37.

[676] Ibid., 42.

[677] Reichskanzlei, "Record of the Results of the Discussion on the Polish Question, Held on 3 and 4 November 1917," November 3, 1917, 43, R43/2477, BArch.

[678] Ibid., 44.

[679] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 34.

> just as much, whether an autonomous Poland, preferably dependent on Germany, will be created, or Poland will be appended to Austria.[680]

Kühlmann strongly endorsed annexing Polish territory along Germany's eastern frontier as indispensible for German security. Hindenburg agreed on this point. Whether or not Germany achieved suzerainty over the Polish state, "The regulation our borders" would need to be "essentially the same" for the "defense of the homeland". The German border would need to be pushed "considerably to the east", along the Warta-Vistula-Narew-Bobr-Neman lines.[681] The OHL also recommended the creation of a greater Lithuania, including the governments of Vilna and Grodno, at the expense of the Kingdom of Poland. In essence, this would have cut off the possibility of Polish expansion eastward, and surrounded the Kingdom of Poland with German territory on three-sides.[682]

Only Beseler opposed these measures and even his dissent was tepid. He again resisted annexations along Poland's western border with the German Empire.[683] Specifically, he insisted that Germany did not need to seize territory around the Białowieża forest.[684] He did not, however, object to the otherwise substantial cessions of Polish territory to Lithuania in the east and Germany in the west. Where before Beseler had previously advocated a large and strategically capable Kingdom of Poland, his faith in the Polish nation had worn thin. By November of 1917, he appears to have resigned himself to a territorially diminished Polish state. He accepted the necessity of a vastly reduced Poland either because he knew his colleagues in Berlin would resist a large Polish state, or because he harbored his own doubts about Polish fidelity and wanted to reduce the danger of a future betrayal by Warsaw.

Annexing Polish territory along the Prussian border served to guarantee German strategic gains against failure. Should the future Kingdom of Poland prove an unfaithful partner, the logic ran, Germany would have still fixed the most glaring vulnerabilities of their eastern frontier. Of course, annexations would only further embitter Poles against the German Empire. That planners in Berlin nonetheless chose to adopt this measure in November 1917 demonstrates how remote they considered the prospects for the eventual success of a German-Polish union.

Despite their obvious frustration, participants at the conference still resisted adopted ethnic cleansing as a policy of ethnic management. Forcible large-scale evacuations of the civilian populations were rejected "by all sides" as "impossible".[685] Helfferich later confirmed his view of the impossibility of ethnic cleansing, though he remained open to voluntary Polish emigration, and even regulated population exchanges with Warsaw.[686] While the OHL had contemplated the construction of "large military training grounds" in annexed territories, whose construction could be used to "remove" a "multitude of rural residents", Hindenburg also concluded that this would not be an effective method for politically stabilizing the new regions.[687]

However, conference participants did consider less radical reinforce Berlin's direct command over annexed Polish territory. Drews, for instance, reintroduced the idea of establishing the new border-strip as a quasi-colony under "German military rule". Annexation of Polish territory to Prussia, the Interior Minister declared, "cannot come into question".[688] Under military dictatorship, Polish residents could be denied the judicial and representative recourse normally available to Prussian citizens. Germany would therefore retain the legal flexibility to

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[680] Reichskanzlei, "Record of the Results of the Discussion on the Polish Question, Held on 3 and 4 November 1917," 40.
[681] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 37, 44.
[682] Reichskanzlei, "Record of the Results of the Discussion on the Polish Question, Held on 3 and 4 November 1917," 40.
[683] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 44–45.
[684] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 49.
[685] Reichskanzlei, "Record of the Results of the Discussion on the Polish Question, Held on 3 and 4 November 1917," 40.
[686] Max Wallraf, "Letter to State Secretary Kühlmann, 14 December 1917," December 14, 1917, 160–61, R1501/119823, BArch.
[687] Chancellery, "Minutes of the Foreign Office Conference, 3 November 1917," 45.
[688] Ibid.

manage the local population as it saw fit, resorting to draconian oppression, or even ethnic cleansing, if local resistance proved stubborn.

Changing imperial strategy in Lithuania and the Baltics similarly expressed Berlin's growing distrust of Warsaw.[689] Discussion of German aims along the Baltic littoral at the November conference confirmed policy-maker's interest in using the future Lithuanian state to counter-balance and neutralize any potential threat from Poland. Ludendorff ardently supported transferring Wilna to Lithuania, not out of any belief in the justice of Lithuanian claims, but explicitly as a move against Poland. He reasoned that a Kingdom of Poland which extended so far north would deny the German army reliable mobilization vectors to forward positions in the Grodno-Kovno region.[690] Moreover, should Germany fail to establish reliable control over the Kingdom of Poland, Ludendorff argued that "an overly strong Poland" was undesirable".[691] Even Beseler agreed that Germany needed to limit the Kingdom of Poland in at least this respect, and asserted that the Poles would eventually reconcile themselves to the loss of Vilna.[692]

In his comments on the Vilna question, Beseler expressed his belief that Germany's interests in the east lay in the eventual reconciliation of Poland and Lithuania, as both states would hopefully operate under some form of German leadership. This vision spurred only scornful responses from around the table. General Hoffmann responded that any treaty relationship between Lithuania and Poland would be a "misfortune" for Germany, and that the "Lithuanians must be our allies in the struggle against Polandom".[693] Hindenburg affirmed that the best policy in cases of such "dubious" political reliabilities would be "divide and rule".[694] Helfferich agreed, noting that Lithuania would need to serve as a "counterweight" to Poland. The optimistic dream of November 1916, that a strong Polish confederate would stand shoulder to shoulder with the German Empire to defend the Occident, had therefore faded. As military and civilian leaders increasingly understood Polish nationalism as a threat to German security, they invested greater effort in balancing and containing Polish influence.

The Berlin conference of 3 November 1917 paints the erosion, or even reversal, of many of the founding assumptions of multinational imperialism in dramatic strokes. Poland had gone from being understood as an asset for Germany's future security, to being feared as a security liability, so threatening as to require preemptive deterrence and containment. Doubting the reliability of a German-Polish union, the Kaiser, the Vice-Chancellor, Hindenburg, the Prussian Minister of the Interior, and the leaders of the Foreign Office and RAI all called for the abandonment of multinationalist plans in Poland, and the adoption of more reliable, and disciplinary, guarantees of German security. They all believed that the events and frictions in Poland over the past year had unambiguously demonstrated Poles' unwillingness to accept Germany's future leadership, even if it was limited to common military and foreign policy. Beseler alone positively defended a multinational imperial vision for Poland. Ludendorff saw no severe harm in at least trying to establish suzerainty over an autonomous Polish state. With the exception of Beseler, all participants wanted to construct Lithuania as a strong counterweight to Poland. Almost all conference participants desired a militarily crippled Polish state. While Beseler meekly attempted to limit annexations, most agreed that imperial security now demanded annexations along Poland's northern *and western* border with Prussia. Against OHL's demands for annexations to the east of Poland, only Beseler raised strenuous objections, and here only to the specific territory around the Białowieża forest.

On 5 November, the *Reichsleitung* and OHL attempted to resolve the fundamental

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[689] Fischer attributes the consensus in favor of transferring Vilna to Lithuania as a move to satisfy Lithuanian nationalists. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 459. This is a suspect interpretation. Discussion of the matter at the November conference focused on containing Polish nationalism, which was considered threatening after July 1917. Appeasement of Lithuanian nationalism, by contrast, was not mentioned in the Foreign Office meeting.

[690] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 48.

[691] Ibid.

[692] Ibid., 51.

[693] Ibid.

[694] Ibid.

question of German aims in Poland left open by the previous meetings during a new Crown Council held in the Bellevue Palace. Neither Beseler nor representatives of the GGW were invited.[695] Overnight, Ludendorff had apparently badgered his comander enough that Hindenburg dropped his waffling opposition and instead endorsed the continued pursuit of a German-Polish union. He did so not from any belief that a Polish state would positively bulwark German security, but rather from his conviction that an Austro-Polish solution was even more likely to equip, invigorate, and support Polish nationalist subversion in the Prussian *Ostmark*.[696] Later in the day, Ludendorff emphasized exactly this point. He continued to argue that a German-Polish union represented the only possible means of defending the Polish "bow". Now, however, he added that German suzerainty represented the only avenue for effectively surveiling and blunting nationalist initiatives in the Kingdom of Poland.[697] While Poles would press irredentist claims under either solution, the OHL now agreed that formal union with Warsaw would at least allow Berlin to police nationalist movements and activities. The German-Polish union had become, for its supporters in the OHL, yet another device for containing and suppressing nationalist subversion.

However, even with the added weight of Hindenburg, the beleaguered supporters of a German-Polish union were unable to override the consensus among civilian policy-makers. Led by the Kaiser, Kühlmann, and Helfferich, the Crown Council decided to abandon efforts to build a German-Polish union, and instead trade hegemony in Poland to Austria for a package of border annexations and influence in Romania.[698] On 6 November, German negotiators therefore offered Poland to Vienna in exchange for the annexation of roughly one third of Congress Poland.[699]

Back in Warsaw, Beseler rushed a letter to Hertling, begging the Chancellor to reverse this decision.[700] Beseler understood the renewed interest in an Austro-Polish solution as a direct result of Berlin's growing distrust of Polish nationalism in the wake of the July mutiny and other political conflicts. He therefore once more attempted to frame these as understandable and discreet conflicts, which yes required adjustments to German imperial policy, but which could still be surmounted with time and commitment. "We have deceived ourselves" regarding the readiness of the Poles to join the war effort against Russia, Beseler agreed, and these unfulfilled expectations for immediate collaboration did not accurately indicate the prospects of a future German-Polish union.[701] He insisted that determined efforts could still salvage the multinationalist project and establish a stable and legitimate German-Polish union.[702]

> The irreconcilable opposition between Germans and Poles is more a historical than a natural [condition], also still more a legend than a historical truth.[703]

Finally, Beseler appealed once more to the federalist narrative of German history to assure Hertling that an autonomous Polish state would be a reliable and valuable strategic asset for its German suzerain. "The German tribes," after all, "have smashed each others' skulls more than the Germans and Poles have".[704]

As Ludendorff was far less confident that a German-Polish union would contribute to the security of the German Empire, his reaction to the abandonment of multinational policy was more ambivalent. Ludendorff accepted the transition to an Austro-Polish solution, and urged the Chancellor to adopt a more aggressive policy of nationalization in regions slated for annexation

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[695] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 12 November 1917," 58.
[696] von Beseler, "Minutes of the Crown Council Meeting in Bellevue Palace, 5 November 1917," 81.
[697] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Further Minutes of the Crown Council Meeting in Bellevue Palace, 5 November 1917," November 5, 1917, 85, N30/24, BArch.
[698] von Beseler, "Minutes of the Crown Council Meeting in Bellevue Palace, 5 November 1917," 80–82; von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 12 November 1917," 58.
[699] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 441.
[700] von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 12 November 1917," 58.
[701] Ibid., 60.
[702] Ibid.
[703] Ibid., 61.
[704] Ibid.

to Germany. In a 15 November letter to the Chancellery, he asked Hertling to reconsider the "expulsion of Poles" from, and "the resettlement of Germans" into, the border-strip.[705] While this had previously been discarded as practically impossible and politically dangerous, Ludendorff now insisted that ethnic cleansing and colonization was an indispensible tool for securing stable control over the newly fortified border, particularly against the threat of Polish irredentism and subversion.[706] Germany, he argued, simply required a "reliable German population" to defend a "secure foreland" against attack or subversion by a Polish or Austro-Polish state.[707]

Ludendorff's 15 November endorsement of ethnic cleansing to stabilize control of annexations represented the nadir of German-Polish relations. In the autumn of 1917, shifting political realities once again made stable multinational union with Poland seem achievable. The Bolshevist seizure of power in Russia in October conjured the specter of communism among property-owning circles in the Kingdom of Poland. Any remaining sympathy for a reformed Russia evaporated. Landowners, industrialists, and monarchists increasingly saw German suzerainty as a viable, even attractive, mechanism to defend the Kingdom of Poland.[708] On 16 November, the Regency Council also elected Jan Kucharzewski as the first Minister President of the Kingdom of Poland. Though nobody's first choice, he proved sufficiently unobjectionable to calm both the embryonic Polish government and German authorities in the GGW and the *Reichsleitung*.[709] Lerchenfeld reassured Beseler that Kucharzewski preferred working with the German Empire, especially given Poland's alternatives of Russian oppression or Austro-Hungarian dysfunction.[710] Kucharzewski also claimed that the Polish population would gradually realize the value of working with the German Empire, and come to trust Berlin.[711] Indeed, Lerchenfeld felt so optimistic about the incoming Minister-President that he recommended a new round of unsolicited concessions to the Regency Council to fortify his influence and legitimacy.[712]

The formation of a Regency Council and their election of a Minister-President quieted local unrest throughout the GGW and calmed occupation officials by extension. The German Mayor of Stoczek, for instance, reported in December that the "sentiment of the population, especially among the people that presume something of a leading role, has become decidedly more pro-German since the establishment of the Regency Council". This was especially true, he reported happily, as the councilors themselves had begun to set an example of productive cooperation with occupation authorities.[713] POW activity, he reported, had diminished noticeably, "or at least the people have become more cautious".[714] With an apparently mutually satisfactory Polish executive in place, German officials again began to hope that Polish national elites would prevail in leading their fellow Poles away from anti-German nationalism, and towards accepting the legitimacy of a German-Polish union.

Following the turbulent events of 1917, occupation authorities tempered these hopes. German officials now nurtured a default suspicion of Polish political and cultural activity, one verging on paranoia. The Mayor of Storczek therefore warned that, while some locals were more willing to work with Germany in the parameters envisioned by Berlin, others continued to demand the transfer of Posen, East Prussia, and West Prussia as the price for Polish participation in the current war. The mayor admitted that he could not accurately gauge how widespread or

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[705] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 15 November 1917," November 15, 1917, 122, R1501/119823, BArch.
[706] Ibid., 123.
[707] Ibid.
[708] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 191.
[709] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Telegram to Chancellor Hertling, 16 November 1917," November 16, 1917, 75, N30/15, BArch.
[710] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Report to the RAI on the Political Situation in the GGW, 29 November 1917," November 29, 1917, 363–64, R1501/119712, BArch.
[711] Ibid., 364.
[712] Ibid., 367.
[713] Osten, "Report to the Feldpolizeizentrale in Łuków by the Mayor of Stoczek, 7 December 1917," December 7, 1917, 23, R1501/119793, BArch.
[714] Ibid.

serious this greater-Polish nationalist sentiment was.[715] Likewise, if the POW seemed weaker now, he still heard about members, especially younger members, some of whom traipsed about town "in an especially ostentatious manner in rough boots with buckles" as if they were "future soldiers".[716] One heard, from time to time, of people carrying weapons and covert "arms caches" might still exist.[717] Thus even positive reports on the renewed prospects of multinationalist collaboration were now saturated with a vigilance against the omnipresent threat of Polish subversion and betrayal.

The appearance of cooperative leadership reignited hopes in Berlin that a stable German-Polish union might yet be achievable. From Warsaw, Beseler reported that position of Polish parties, which had expressed sympathy for a German-Polish union seemed more tenable.[718] On 29 November 1917, Helfferich submitted a new memo to the Kaiser, wherein he retreated from his stark opposition to multinational imperialism. He advised the Kaiser that Berlin should not trust and "paper" agreements in which Poland renounced claims to Prussia. He allowed that Berlin should carefully consider its basic strategic plan, but Helfferich insisted that more spacious annexations along the German-Polish border would be necessary to guarantee German security from Polish plots.

> The security necessary for us can only be created primarily at the cost of Poland, above all with regard to strategic border-rectifications.[719]

GGW and Foreign Office reports also registered a growing discomfort among Polish notables in Warsaw with the prospect of attachment to the dysfunctional Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially because Poles recognized that an Austro-Polish solution might entail larger German annexations.[720] Kaiser Wilhelm II would arrive at a similar impression of Polish disdain for an Austro-Polish solution, and their consequent receptivity to German suzerainty, when he eventually met with the Regency council in January 1918.[721] By late winter 1917 opposition to multinational imperialism in Berlin had ebbed significantly. Beseler felt confident enough that he again formally proposed extending the GGW's administrative jurisdiction up to the Bug river, a clear prelude to eastward expansion of the Kingdom of Poland.[722]

As the *Reichsleitung* and GGW prepared for negotiations with the new Bolshevik government at Brest-Litovsk, their principles for discussion also reflected renewed doubts over the Austro-Polish solution. Kühlmann and General Hoffmann represented Germany in negotiations, and Hoffmann was instructed to seek recognition of the Polish state, and its close connection with the Central Powers.[723] On 18 December, the Kaiser, Hertling, and the OHL again met at General Headquarters in Kreuznach to discuss upcoming negotiations with the Bolshevik government.[724] Here Ludendorff and Hindenburg supported fortifying Germany's eastern border through large annexations in Congress Poland. But the *Reichsleitung* again voiced concerns about annexing large expanses of densely populated territory. For one, Vienna seemed unwilling

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[715] Ibid.
[716] Ibid.
[717] Ibid.
[718] Wilhelm von Born-Fallois, "Report to the RAI, 15 November 1917," November 15, 1917, 109–14, R1501/119792, BArch; Kriminalkommissar Klann, "Bericht über die öffentliche Versammlung des K.P.P. am 4. November 1917," November 4, 1917, 128, R1501/119792, BArch.
[719] Karl Helfferich, "Commentary on Drucki-Lubecki's Reform Proposals, 4 December 1917," December 4, 1917, 87, R1501/119673, BArch.
[720] Foreign Office, "Report to State Secretary Wallraf, 31 December 1917," December 31, 1917, 5–6, R1501/119674, BArch; Chief of Administration for the GGW, "Report to the RAI, 8 January 1918," January 8, 1918, 31, R1501/119674, BArch.
[721] von dem Bussche, "Report to State Secretary Wallraf, 11 Jnauary 1918," January 11, 1918, 13, R1501/119674, BArch.
[722] von dem Bussche, "Foreign Office Report to Governor General Beseler, 12 January 1918," January 12, 1918, 9, R1501/119674, BArch.
[723] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 480.
[724] Reichskanzlei, "Minutes of Conference in Großen Hauptquartier on 18 December 1917," December 18, 1917, 65, R43/2477, BArch.

to concede to Berlin the border in Poland which military planners considered a necessary condition for accepting the Austro-Polish solution.[725] Secondly, the Chancellery doubted that the *Reichstag* majority parties would tolerate such claims. Finally, civilian planners once again balked at the nationalizing methods of ethnic management that might be required to establish stable control over these regions. Despite Ludendorff's endorsement of ethnic cleansing, neither Hertling nor Kühlmann considered this plausible or acceptable tool for stabilizing German rule over a border-strip. They therefore once again objected to substantial annexations in the west of Poland, stating that the flood of new Polish-speaking citizens of Prussia would reinforce likely destabilize Berlin's control over its eastern border.[726] When negotiations opened at Brest-Litovsk on 22 December 1917, therefore,the German government and military leadership therefore had not reached any clear consensus on their ultimate strategic vision for Poland.

Germany's imperial leadership only reached agreement on a course of action in January 1918. By then, renewed hopes in the plausibility of long-term multinational union with Poland, growing doubts over the value of an Austro-Polish solution, and severe aversion to methods of ethnic management considered necessary to rule any large annexations in Poland had all pushed imperial policy-makers to once more support, if reluctantly, a German-Polish union. The OHL continued to petition for more substantial annexations in Poland than the Chancellery was willing to concede, but Germany's military and civilian policy-makers otherwise agreed to support the continued pursuit of a German-Polish union.[727] The GGW, and *Reichsleitung* still considered multinational imperialism the best strategic option to secure German control over its eastern frontier. However, the crises of the summer and autumn of 1917 had left permanent scars on German imperial policy. Those who again endorsed multinational imperialism after November 1917 now offered more tenuous and qualified support and demanded at least some concrete guarantees to defend against Polish treachery.

Prior to this stabilization, however, word of Berlin's brief abandonment of multinational imperialism quickly circulated among political writers and intellectuals, producing mixed feelings among multinationalists, and ringing endorsements from nationalist skeptics. Some multinationalists, like Ignaz Jastrow, continued to support a German-Polish union, and worried about the wavering support in Berlin. Jastrow conceded that the policy of November 1916 had caused "problems upon problems", but he argued that no solution could have avoided temporary political strife.[728] Jastrow urged German authorities to continue building a Polish state, even if the prospect of German suzerainty seemed slim. The German Empire needed to fulfill its promises to Poland, if only to retain credibility in Eastern Europe.[729]

By 15 November 1917 Naumann had become so frustrated with Poles' reluctance to collaborate with German authorities, that he endorsed a return to the Austro-Polish solution.[730] To Naumann's eyes, Polish leaders had refused to meet any of Berlin's reasonable expectations, especially their desire for a renunciation of Polish claims to Prussian territory. He complained:

> We Germans should be just and benevolent to the Poles, but we are not obligated to dismantle our own state for their sake, which they would certainly also not do if the situation were reversed.[731]

Having refused to renounce these claims, Naumann worried that the new "Varsovian Staat", would continue to present a "European danger" as it pursued irredentist claims in Prussia and Galicia. Nationalist "dissatisfaction", he warned, would naturally bend the state's foreign policy

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[725] Ibid.
[726] Ibid.
[727] Prussian Staatsministerium, "Minutes of Meeting in the Royal Staatsministerium, 17 January 1918," January 17, 1918, 81, R43/2021, BArch.
[728] Ignaz Jastrow, "Die osteuropäische Frage," *Deutsche Politik* 3 (February 8, 1918): 169.
[729] Ibid.
[730] Friedrich Naumann, "Die österreichisch-polnische Lösung," *Die Hilfe* 46, no. 23 (November 15, 1917): 962.
[731] Ibid., 964.

in an "anti-German and anti-Austrian" direction.[732] Naumann therefore withdrew his support for the creation of an autonomous Polish state as a member of a Central European confederation. Instead he argued that Polish membership in *Mitteleuropa* needed to be mediated. Warsaw needed to be carefully controlled and disciplined, either as a German protectorate or by attachment to Austria-Hungary. Believing that the Austro-Hungarian constitution would more effectively contain Polish nationalism, Naumann now supported the Austro-Polish solution. Though still a multinationalist, one who hoped to incorporate the Habsburg state into a German-led *Mitteleuropa*, Naumann no longer considered it possible to enlist Polish collaboration purely through political negotiation. Naumann did not believe the grand bargain of autonomy for loyalty to a multinational union would suffice to legitimize multinational confederation. Even Naumann therefore began to compromise his commitment to Polish political autonomy and agency. If Poles would not be bargained with, they would have to be bracketed, contained, and controlled with a larger Austro-Hungarian state.[733]

Frustrations in Poland in 1917 deeply impressed German policy-makers, and also appears to have permanently altered their strategic plans for the Baltics. In 1917, a variety of factors compelled German policy-makers to abandon their original plans to annex and Germanize large swathes of territory in the Baltic littoral, and instead construct German influence on the foundation of collaboration with local Lithuanians, Latvians, and White Ruthenians. At this point, the model of federal multinational union would have theoretically accomplished Berlin's most pressing strategic objectives, while granting autonomy to potential Lithuanian and Baltic States. Berlin could have replicated the Polish program in the Baltics, building a string of states with full domestic autonomy while establishing permanent suzerainty over them in matters of foreign policy and wartime military command.

However, frustration with Poles' apparent refusal to collaborate with the German Empire had already tarnished the credibility of multinational imperialism among German planners, almost precisely when the political situation in the Baltics demanded flexibility. Military and civilian leaders no longer felt confident that a Polish state would reliably defend a German-Polish union. Consequently, they hesitated to trust new states in the Baltics with the same degree of autonomy and military responsibility that plans for a German-Polish union had entailed. They worried that any significant measure of autonomy would make states like Lithuania unreliable components of the German imperial structure. Tellingly, German planners also feared that Poland would exert effective cultural and political hegemony over any Lithuanian state not tightly controlled by Berlin. The frustrations of 1917 in occupied Poland, therefore, had convinced German policy-makers that political autonomy under German suzerainty would be insufficient to guarantee German strategic interests in the Baltics. Frustrations in Poland had conditioned Berlin to be far less confident in their ability to negotiate stable and mutually beneficial security unions with local nations through quasi-federal institutions.

During the early years of Germany's occupation, military commanders and civilian advisors of Ober Ost had aimed to eventually annex, colonize, and Germanize, the Baltic governorates. Ludendorff, initially as Chief of Staff for Ober Ost and then as Quartermaster General, had persistently supported a project of annexation and colonization from April 1916 through the spring of 1917.[734] In February and March 1917, Ober Ost representatives had formally proposed a program along these lines to the Foreign Office and Chancellery.[735] In April, Ober Ost had instructed its district chiefs to begin preparing statistical summaries of local demography and landownership to guide later colonization initiatives.[736] In a 5 April meeting with representatives of the Chancellery at Bingen, Ludendorff had proposed carving the Baltics into a Grand Duchy of Lithuania and a Grand Duchy of Courland, both in personal union with Wilhelm II.[737] The

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[732] Ibid.
[733] Ibid., 966.
[734] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94–95.
[735] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 277; Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 95.
[736] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 94–95.
[737] Ibid., 196.

continued will to Germanize Lithuania and Courland reflected the lower status of Baltic nationhood in the eyes of German imperialists, which had structured Germany's strategic planning from the beginning of the war. A perception that national identities had either not emerged in the region, or were not yet culturally developed, gave the planners of Ober Ost hope that German language and culture could still dislocate their native counterparts with little organized nationalist resistance. Sharing this perception of Baltics as politically inert, civilian planners and agencies in Berlin had largely agreed with Ober Ost's nationalizing strategy for ruling the Baltics. Even many who had supported multinational imperialism in Poland had considered annexation, colonization, and Germanization appropriate strategies of ethnic management for the Baltic populations.

Over the spring and summer of 1917, German authorities came to the gradual conclusion that this overtly nationalizing paradigm of imperialism in the Baltics was no longer possible. The February Revolution in Russia had birthed new rumors of impending political and cultural concessions from Petrograd and German observers felt pressure to compete for local sympathies.[738] Contrary to earlier German assumptions, Lithuanian political elites appeared capable of mobilizing at least some political opposition to the harsh economic, political, and cultural policies of the military occupation. The brutality of the occupation had, if anything, produced a nationalist backlash among Lithuanians, mobilizing the opposition of formerly indifferent peasants.[739] Both organized and spontaneous resistance was growing more routine and threatening throughout 1917. Overstretched German troops essentially abandoned their efforts to combat rural banditry, and were subject to violent attacks.[740] By the spring of 1917 therefore, even the OHL recognized the need for a reconfiguration of occupation strategy to secure German influence.[741] Finally, the Reichstag's July 1917 Peace Resolution had complicated plans for outright annexation of the territories advocated by many in the German army.

To address these new political conditions, German imperialists at first seemed willing to consider replicating the architecture of the German-Polish union in the Baltics. Searching for alternative structures to assert German hegemony, planners quickly realized the need for establishing a series of autonomous Baltic States to satisfy local demands for self-governance, and then bring them under indirect German control.[742] In a 21 April meeting at Kreuznach, Bethmann Hollweg and Helfferich proposed establishing autonomous Lithuanian and Couronian states in association with the German Empire.[743] The following day, Behmann Hollweg and Helfferich met with Prussian ministers, again floating the idea of a generalized multinational imperial strategy for Eastern Europe. In order to head off Petrograd's overtures to their border nationalities, the pair suggested offering "autonomy" not only to Poland, but also to Lithuania and any other Baltic territories that peace negotiations might secure for Germany.[744] Their equation of Polish and Baltic policy certainly suggested their interest in mimicking the pending multinational and federal arrangement with Warsaw in these new states. New orders for occupation policy in Ober Ost showed the army's reluctant submission to the new course. On 2 May Ludendorff rescinded previous Germanization polies in an effort to win the cooperation of Lithuanian nationalists.[745] On 3 May, Bethmann Hollweg addressed the party leadership of the Center and FVP, and announced his intention to establish autonomous Baltic states in military, political, and economic association with the German Empire.[746] While extending peace-feelers to the Russian provisional government, Bethmann Hollweg instructed his negotiators.

To avoid using the word 'annexations' or 'frontier rectifications', which they also

[738] Ibid., 177.
[739] Ibid., 184.
[740] Ibid., 180–81.
[741] Ibid., 195.
[742] Ibid., 178.
[743] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 348.
[744] Ibid., 376.
[745] Ibid., 464.
[746] Ibid., 457.

> dislike, I think it worth considering the idea already put forward by me, in order to make the renunciation of Courland and Lithuania palatable to the Russians, of dressing them up as independent states, leaving them their own, autonomous internal administration but attaching them to us militarily, politically, and economically[747]

On 17 May he ordered the leadership of Ober Ost to begin working to establish political conditions in the region which would allow for the creation of autonomous states bound to Germany via military and political treaties.[748] Though his scheme remained vague, Bethmann Hollweg's Baltic policy seemed to be replicating the multinationalist model of domestic autonomy under German suzerainty. He favored real political autonomy for Lithuania and Courland, specifying, for instance, that they should be ruled by their own independent dynasties.[749] His specification of military attachment further implied the creation of Lithuanian and Couronian militaries.

The July mutiny in Poland immediately shifted German attitudes towards Baltic policy. In light of the Reichstag peace resolution, Ober Ost and Berlin ostensibly continued to develop forms of hegemony that nominally preserved cultural autonomy for the various nationalities of the region. But the July mutiny and subsequent political crises shattered German policy-makers' trust that an autonomous Kingdom of Poland could be relied upon to defend and serve a multinational German-Polish union. Consequently, German authorities became far more hesitant to create authentically autonomous states which might threaten or betray the German Empire. From mid-1917, until the end of the war, German imperial policy in the Baltics preserved the façade of creating self-governing national states. In reality, however, Berlin worked to cripple states like Lithuania, and intrusively control their own domestic governance. Though German leaders drafted plans for new Baltic states in 1917 and 1918, they offered only nominal autonomy. Unlike Germany's original policy towards the Kingdom of Poland, the nature of this autonomy was generally stripped of any effective federal safeguards for particularism. German policy deliberately avoided promising national armies to these nascent states. After July, national armies increasingly represented a potential instrument of treachery to German policy-makers. National armies had always represented a material guarantee of domestic autonomy and federal rights. After sustained frictions with the Polish government, policy-makers no longer wanted to offer Baltic states such guarantees. German authorities simultaneously attempted to shut out Polish political and cultural influence in the Baltics, and indeed used Baltic policy to balance and contain the Kingdom of Poland.

Political frictions in occupied Eastern Europe emboldened nationalizing imperialists in Ober Ost. On 10 July, Alfred von Gossler, the Chief of the German administration for Courland, sharply objected to the Chancellery's emerging autonomy policy, and demanded a return to plans for annexations and Germanization in the Baltics.[750] Though he indicated he could accept the creation of weak states closely controlled from Berlin through Personal union, he considered further delegation of power to the Baltic peoples to be reckless and disadvantageous.[751]

Beginning in July 1917, the OHL and civilian leaders quickly revised the imperial policy that Bethmann Hollweg had been gesturing towards over the previous months. On 25 July 1917, Zimmermann and Ludendorff met to discuss objectives in the Baltics. Both agreed that German power would require at least the appearance of native ratification, and therefore resolved to organize national trustee committees, who would, in turn, petition the German Empire for its military protection.[752] However, they stepped back from any genuine provision of autonomy to the occupied populations. They wanted to establish neither a genuine representative parliament nor an autonomous state administration. Rather than separate local ruling dynasties, the pair decided

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[747] Quoted in Ibid., 381–82.
[748] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 197.
[749] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 381.
[750] Ibid., 458.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Ibid.

that future Baltic states would be bound in personal-union with the Hohenzollern dynasty. In any future militaries that might be established, German would be the language of command, effectively transforming armies into vehicles for Germanization, rather than safeguards for local prerogatives.[753] The plans first sketched out in this meeting essentially served as the blueprint for German Baltic policy until the end of the war. Its basic components would be; febrile autonomy, close German control over domestic governance, a lack of military influence, and the possibility of future Germanization and annexation.

At the same 3 November meeting which paved the way for Germany's temporary abandonment of multinationalist policy in Poland, Wilhelm von Gayl, the chief of the Political Department for Ober Ost, presented a sketch of Germany's future political and military relationship with Baltic states. Notably absent from his description, and conference minutes generally, was mention of a Lithuanian national army.[754] Instead, Gayl intended Germany to secure command of Lithuania through "garrison rights", i.e. a permanent quasi-occupation.[755] None of the assembled GGW, Ober Ost, OHL, or *Reichsleitung* officials objected or attempted to amend these plans.

Failing to mention the creation of Baltic national armies was not an oversight, but policy. Having decided to create a new Lithuanian state, Ober Ost officials had convened a body of Lithuanian notables who, they hoped, would ratify Germany's strategic decisions in the region. The assembly had subsequently elected the *Taryba*, a small governing body, to represent Lithuanian interests in negotiations with German officials. On 1 December 1917, representatives of the *Taryba*, met with Hertling in Berlin to present a declaration of Lithuanian statehood request authorization for a constitutional assembly.[756] Recognizing Germany's own strategic interests, the delegation expressed Lithuania's readiness to bind itself to Germany in a "perpetual and firm federal relationship [*Bundesverhältnis*]", under the condition that Berlin recognize their autonomy and support their national interests.[757] Discussions clarified that the Lithuanian representatives aimed to strike essentially the same bargain that had been offered to Poland: Lithuania would enjoy robust domestic autonomy and organize its own national army, but relinquish responsibility for foreign policy and wartime military command to Berlin. Indeed, they spoke the language of federal multinationalist imperialism, suggesting that "the Lithuanian military would approximately equate to the south-German federal contingents" in its relationship with the larger German military apparatus.[758] The delegation also offered to conclude treaties which would establish a commercial and infrastructural relationship between Lithuania and Germany similar to that already enjoyed by the "South German federal states".[759] Taryba representatives therefore proposed a multinationalist German-Lithuanian union almost identical to Beseler's plans for a German-Polish union. Resigned to the reality of Germany's regional hegemony, the delegation hoped to secure a relationship with Berlin, which would mimic entrance into the German federal empire in all but membership in the Reichstag. Importantly, they hoped to create a Lithuanian national army under their own command in times of peace, in order to deter or fend intrusions into Lithuanian autonomy.

German policy-makers might have accepted this offer months before, but they now rejected it as dangerous. Hindenburg objected to the Lithuanian offer, particularly to the Taryba's proposed military convention. Rather than trusting Lithuania with its own army, Hindenburg insisted that natives should simply be conscripted into units of the German Army.[760]

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[753] Ibid., 459.
[754] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 52.
[755] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 202. Wilhelm von Gayl explained his strategic vision for the Baltics in his memoirs, published during WWII. His description should therefore be taken with a grain of salt. His statements do, however, fit with available evidence of strategic plans in Ober Ost.
[756] Chancellery, "Report on Taryba Petition for Lithuanian Statehood, 1 December 1917," December 1, 1917, 55, R43/2477, BArch; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 468.
[757] Chancellery, "Report on Taryba Petition for Lithuanian Statehood, 1 December 1917," 56.
[758] Ibid.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 468.

Military service within the German army would supplement efforts to Germanize the country, while avoiding the danger that a Lithuanian army would suddenly betray Germany. Unsatisfied with the degree of military autonomy specified by the Lithuanian declaration of statehood, German officials redrafted a new declaration, editing out any mention of "South German federal states" or "federal contingents". The edited declaration now read that Lithuania and Germany would conclude a "military convention, which would ensure the security of Lithuanian territory".[761] The revision tellingly freed the German Empire from any commitment to permit a Lithuanian national army, and instead deliberately established a legal basis for Germany to assume unilateral responsibility for Lithuania's military security. While the Lithuanian state would not directly contribute to the military strength of the German Empire, the revised declaration ensured Berlin would not have to worry about the prospect of a well-equipped and well-trained Lithuanian army betraying Germany at a critical moment. Moreover, Berlin would have no armed organization to obstruct the later Germanization and annexation of the region.

On 6-7 December, the *Reichsleitung* and OHL met to discuss which of the proposed drafts of Lithuanian statehood should be officially adopted.[762] Hertling, Kühlmann, Wallraf, Stein, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Bartenwerffer, and Hoffmann were all present. Based upon the "weighty military concerns" entailed by an autonomous Lithuanian state, the assembled military and civilian leaders concluded that the *Taryba* should be presented with the second, edited draft of the declaration, and pressured to accept it as soon as possible.[763] Rather than establishing a mutually acceptable federal relationship with an autonomous Lithuanian government, Berlin now insisted upon unilateral military command over a puppet state with no effective guarantees for its own autonomy, a relationship which the German Empire would be free to unilaterally alter, should it decide that its interests required a different strategy of ethnic management. German policy-makers were no longer confident that a Lithuanian state would serve German imperial interests. Both multinational imperialism and its corresponding federalist organization appeared excessively risky to Berlin. On 11 December, the *Taryba* duly accepted the revision, and proclaimed a Lithuanian state in "firm and permanent alliance with Germany", but made no mention of a specifically federal relationship.[764]

It would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that Berlin's newfound apprehension over equipping the Lithuanian state with its own national army derived from anything but their disillusioning experiences with multinational imperialism in Poland. While relations between German troops and the occupied population in Ober Ost were tense, there had been no dramatic organized repudiation of the German Empire by Lithuanian leaders, at least nothing so subversive as the July mutiny in Poland. There had not been time for German policy-makers to grow frustrated with maneuvers, postponements, or new conditions submitted by Lithuanian political leaders. The *Taryba* had offered to submit to German suzerainty and federal leadership with little delay. Lithuania was far smaller, less populated, and less industrialized than Congress Poland. The only potential nationalist claims Lithuanians might assert on German territory were limited to a small strip of territory around Memel. Moreover, German policy-makers and intellectuals had generally seen Lithuania as underdeveloped, culturally, economically, and socially. They had a predominantly low estimation of Lithuanian political elites' ability to mobilize mass support in pursuit of national goals. Lithuania nationalism seemed far less threatening to the German Empire than Polish nationalism. Nonetheless, German policy-makers avoided granting Lithuania federal autonomy, indeed refused a petition by the Taryba to this effect, primarily because experience in Poland had taught them that non-German states could not be trusted to defend and serve the German Empire.

While German policy-makers recognized the value of nominal autonomy, experiences in Poland had made the military and civilian leaders wary of empowering native elites. They therefore sought to impose a much more intrusive degree of centralized control over Baltic

[761] Chancellery, "Report on Taryba Petition for Lithuanian Statehood, 1 December 1917," 60.
[762] Ibid., 61.
[763] Ibid., 62.
[764] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 204.

governments. Unlike the Kingdom of Poland, these new states would not have their own sovereign, either native or from a German dynasty, and would instead be ruled as extensions of Prussia in personal-union with the Hohenzollern crown.

Already at the 3 November general conference on war aims in Eastern Europe, German authorities assented to Gayl's proposal to bind the new duchies of Courland and Lithuania in personal union with the Hohenzollern crown.[765] Additionally, Ober Ost wanted a permanent German occupation force to remain in this region as a *Landesverweser,* even after the war. Indeed Gayl believed that Germany should temporarily exercise "firm authoritarian leadership" over the new Duchies, in the form of an imperial viceroy or governor.[766] On 18 December 1917, the Chancellor, Kaiser, and Hindenburg met again to clarify their objectives for the Baltics.[767] While the Kaiser stated his belief that "foreign peoples" must be ruled with a "long rein", and allowed to develop their own cultural character to some extent, he did not believe this should entail any meaningful political autonomy for Baltic states.[768] Instead the Kaiser affirmed earlier decisions not to provide any Baltic states with their own dynasties, as this would compromise Berlin's local political control, and might make their governments vulnerable to malign influence from Warsaw or Petrograd.[769] Only personal-union could ensure Germany's lasting command of the region. Chancellor Hertling agreed to pursue personal-union pending the approval of Germany's other federal princes.[770]

Planners in Berlin understood even this compromised autonomy as a transitional, rather than a permanent state. The duchies of Courland and Lithuania were not designed to guarantee political autonomy and cultural security in the long term, but rather to temporarily satisfy the sensibilities of the Reichstag and international opinion. Unlike in Poland, many policy-makers considered promises of autonomy to be a veil for subsequent annexation and Germanization. At the 3 November Foreign Office conference, Ober Ost representatives reasserted a strategic vision for the region premised on the gradual Germanization of its population and the eventual incorporation of their territories into the German Empire. Wilhelm von Gayl clarified that the duchies of Lithuania and Courland were intended neither to institutionalize national culture nor safeguard local political autonomy. Ober Ost explicitly presumed that these new polities would not remain indefinitely foreign. Gayl explained that Courland was to be "Germanized as soon as possible" via systematic colonization to dilute and convert the local Latvian population. Lithuania, Gayl clarified, would "come to Germandom through bilingualism", i.e. by encouraging the gradual displacement of Lithuanian with German as the dominant language of governance and commerce.[771] From the beginning, the language of governance and military command would be German.[772] During a meeting in which policy-makers excoriated Polish policy for its leniency, nobody raised objections to Ober Ost's proposals for a more nationalizing strategic vision in the Baltics.

Ober Ost carried through on these plans. After establishing a *Landrat* largely-controlled by resident German-speaking barons, the Couronian government publicly offered the title of Grand Duke of Courland to Kaiser Wilhelm II, which he accepted.[773] The Baltic barons quickly volunteered one third of their own landholdings for the purpose of settling ethnic Germans in Courland.[774] Ober Ost began organizing the colonization effort, and even compiled waiting lists of interested settlers.[775] The creation of temporary and nominally autonomous polities in the Baltics

[765] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 52.
[766] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 202.
[767] Reichskanzlei, "Minutes of Conference in Großen Hauptquartier on 18 December 1917," 64.
[768] Ibid., 65.
[769] Ibid.
[770] Ibid.
[771] Schulze, "Minutes of Conference at the Foreign Office, 4 November 1917," 52–54.
[772] Ibid., 53.
[773] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 208.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Ibid.

remained Berlin's basic strategy until the end of the war.[776] On 23 March 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II recognized Lithuanian independence specifically according to the December declaration. Some among the German leadership felt even ratification of this nominal autonomy was a misstep. Hoffmann, for instance, argued that "Lithuania can only become something if it is tightly joined to Prussia, not through independence".[777] Despite the Kaiser's official recognition of Lithuanian statehood, German officials continued to plan for the eventual union of Lithuania with Prussia or even Saxony.[778] Multinationalist plans in the Baltics therefore miscarried in the wake of ongoing crises in Poland. In place of genuinely autonomous states under German suzerainty, Berlin sought to establish febrile placeholder governments to facilitate covert Germanization.

As German authorities increasingly regarded the Kingdom of Poland as potential rival for influence in Eastern Europe, they also became concerned with ensuring that Warsaw could not conspire with or manipulate the Lithuanian government to turn against the German Empire. From the first months of the war, German imperialists had broadly considered Polish civilization a competitor for cultural hegemony in East Central Europe, especially in the Baltic Littoral. The intellectual and cultural influence of Polish elites within Lithuanian society had particularly concerned German imperialists. Since the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Polish speakers had constituted a significant minority in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, Polish-speakers had been disproportionately represented among the social and intellectual elite of the region, and had occupied many positions of wealth and status, particularly in Vilnius. Poles owned considerable tracts of land around Vilnius and, in the city itself, the use of the Polish had long been used to signal cultural literacy and social distinction.[779]

Several German imperialists had quickly identified the presence of this influential minority as a potential obstacle to German control of the region. Already in August 1915, Silvio Broederich-Kurmahlen had advocated demographically reengineering Lithuanian territory. Specifically, he recommended expelling the ethnic Polish minority of Lithuania into the new Polish state.[780] Polish influence over Lithuanian society had seemed problematic enough when Ober Ost had adopted an overtly nationalizing paradigm of ethnic management in the region. In 1917, the increasingly apparent need to establish a Lithuanian government, underscored the threat posed by this minority. Even if the German Empire intended to closely monitor and manipulate the Lithuanian government, they worried about Poles gaining influence over corners of the new Lithuanian state. The rapidly diminishing trust between Berlin and Warsaw only exacerbated fears that the Polish nationalists, perhaps under Warsaw's direction, might conspire to supplant German control over the country.

This specific fear of Polish rivalry for Lithuania reinforced German authorities' interest in binding Lithuania in personal union to the Hohenzollern dynasty. On 20 February 1918, Vice Chancellor Friedrich von Payer, representatives of the Foreign Office, and key officials from the Ober Ost occupation convened to discuss Baltic policy.[781] Undersecretary Wilhelm von Radowitz of the Foreign Office introduced the meeting, clarifying that discussion would focus on whether Germany should pursue a close "real- and personal-union" with new border states, or if it should establish the duchies of Courland and Lithuania with their own dynasties, either chosen from among native elites or from a German line. For his part, Radowitz believed granting Baltic states their own separate ruling dynasties exposed a dangerous avenue for "Polish influence in Lithuania".[782] Polish aristocrats, intellectuals, and administrators, might gain effective control over the court and cabinet of an isolated Grand Duke in Lithuania. In contrast personal-union of

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[776] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference with Ober Ost on Baltic Policy, 10-11 March 1918," March 11, 1918, 98, R43/2477, BArch.
[777] Quoted in Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 209.
[778] Ibid.
[779] Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 54.
[780] Silvio Broedrich-Kurmahlen, "Das neue Ostland" (Ostlandverlag, August 28, 1915), 74, N30/34, BArch.
[781] Reichskanzlei, "Minutes of Discussion Regarding the Lithuanian Question," February 20, 1918, 90, R43/2477, BArch.
[782] Ibid., 91.

the Grand Duchy with the Hohenzollern dynasty would allow the Kaiser to directly select the upper echelons of the Ducal administration. The Kaiser could effectively bar the entrance of Polish nationalists into the government. Grand Duke Wilhelm would naturally ensure the equation of Lithuanian and German interests. Friedrich von Falkenhausen, the Civilian Commissioner for Courland and Lithuania, endorsed Personal-union of the Baltic duchies with the Hohenzollern senior line, for basically the same reasons.[783] Generalmajor Paul von Bartenwerffer similarly justified personal-union as a necessary inoculation against the "danger of the Poles in Lithuania". "Only personal-union" could offer an absolute "guarantee" for the reliability of the new Duchies.[784]

Vice-Chancellor Payer expressed concerns about personal-union, but not because of its heavy-handed imposition of German authority. Rather, he worried that the Reichstag would vehemently oppose anything that smacked of annexation.[785] Handing the Kaiser the Ducal titles, he argued, would sound a whit too close to Prussian annexation. Payer believed that installing other German princes as Grand Dukes, and binding the new states to the German Empire via treaties, would offer "sufficient guarantees" for German interests.[786] But Payer remained a lone dissenting voice. Chancellor Hertling, who had largely refrained from the debate over Ducal candidates, noted only that "the suggestion of Falkenhausen appears useful".[787] The meeting concluded by identifying personal-union as Germany's policy "in principle".[788]

When the OHL and *Reichsleitung* convened on 10 March to discuss Baltic imperial policy, German authorities introduced yet more severe measures to ensure that the Lithuanian state would be quarantined from Polish influence. Keyserlingk, proposed manipulating the Lithuanian constitution to protect it "against the Polish danger".[789] He identified Vilnius as the center of Polish social, intellectual, and cultural influence in Lithuania. Gaining effective control over landownership around the city, he argued, would be essential to halting Polish demographic growth, reducing Polish economic power, and eventually de-Polonizing the region. Keyserlingk therefore suggested Germany closely regulate sales and financing of land in the area, and perhaps even purchase local Polish property. Participants rejected this idea as impractical. Nonetheless, Keyserlingk, Ludendorff, and others at the table agreed that drafting an anti-Polish agrarian policy deserved consideration.[790] In a conference on Polish Policy at Bellevue on 12 March 1918, the Prussian Interior Minister similarly warned that, given the "danger" presented by a new Polish state, Lithuania could not be burdened by a large Polish population.[791]

Finally, German policy-makers planned to use the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to balance and diplomatically contain the Kingdom of Poland. Ober Ost already sought to use Lithuania to militarily contain Poland as of 3 November. Gayl later described Ober Ost's plans to fashion Lithuania as a fortress of the German Empire, organized to facilitate the easy deployment of the German army against Russia as well as Poland. Should Warsaw turn against the German Empire, German divisions stationed in Lithuania would already occupy a "commanding flanking position against Poland".[792] In his 18 December meeting with Herling and military commanders, the Kaiser likewise signaled his agreement with the OHL's view that political hostilities between Lithuania and Poland should be "deepened" and instrumentalized to more effectively contain Warsaw.[793] Hertling raised no objections to this device.

In meetings on 10-11 March 1918, Ludendorff again proposed extending the borders of Lithuania far south into White Ruthenia for "military and economic purposes", so that it

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[783] Ibid., 92.
[784] Ibid., 92–95.
[785] Ibid., 92.
[786] Ibid., 94.
[787] Ibid., 96.
[788] Ibid., 95.
[789] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference with Ober Ost on Baltic Policy, 10-11 March 1918," 104.
[790] Ibid.
[791] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," March 13, 1918, 119, R43/2477, BArch.
[792] Quoted in Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 202.
[793] Reichskanzlei, "Minutes of Conference in Großen Hauptquartier on 18 December 1917," 65.

neighbored the newly established Ukraine.[794]

> With consideration to Poland, a staging area of sufficient depth in the area of Bialystok-Grodno would be absolutely necessary, and thus the transfer of these predominantly Polish territories to Lithuania can unfortunately not be avoided.[795]

His statement demonstrates Ludendorff's continued belief that Warsaw could not be considered a reliable strategic resource in the future, that it could not be trusted to cooperate with, and contribute to, the defense of a German-Polish union from Russia. Instead Lithuania, first as a nominally autonomous state, and later as part of the German Empire, would need to provide the German army with the short and defensible eastern border with Russia that Berlin had so long desired. For Ludendorff the Kingdom of Poland had ceased to represent a potential strategic resource. He now considered it a relatively neutral territory, at best. At worst, he regarded it as a threat that needed to be carefully contained, deterred, and dragooned into obedience to the German Empire. Connecting Lithuania to Russia also functioned as a means to surround Poland with German army units from three cardinal directions, forcing Warsaw's good behavior at gunpoint. In short, balancing Lithuania against Poland signaled multinational imperialism's severe loss of credibility during the war. As Ludendorff's proposal to employ Lithuania in the encirclement of Poland met with no objections, discussion once more focused on how to ensure Berlin's unassailable control over Baltic governments.

In the wake of the Oath Crisis, therefore, German policy-makers became suspicious of multinational imperialism. Naturally, they became far less willing to trust that the population and government of the Kingdom of Poland would defend a German-Polish union in the event of war. Fearing that the Kingdom of Poland was more likely to conspire against and betray the German Empire, military and civilian leaders briefly abandoned plans for multinational union. Even after they returned to a multinationalist paradigm, they demanded more substantial assurances of German security should Poland prove unreliable: larger annexations along the Prussian border, a smaller and less powerful Kingdom of Poland, and its strategic containment. German imperial planners ultimately returned to multinational union as the only means that might achieve German objectives in Poland with a minimum of violence and without provoking lasting political instability in the region. But they did so with new qualifications and contingencies.

The crises of 1917 also undermined the credibility of multinationalism as a template of imperial management. In the summer of 1917, Berlin had compelling political and strategic reasons to seek multinational union with newly formed Baltic states, and indeed Lithuanian political elites offered to accept essentially the same grand bargain that the German Empire had long sought to conclude with Poland. After the summer of 1917, however, German policy-makers were no longer willing to take this bargain because they did not believe autonomous states under German suzerainty would actually contribute to imperial security. German leaders instead sought to create militarily impotent states with invasive German control over nominally independent governments. Their goal was no longer to collaborate with national elites in states like Lithuania and to permit the institutionalization of local national cultures. Rather, nominal autonomy would function as a veil for eventual Germanization. Overall, German imperial policy in Eastern Europe shifted from an emphasis on 'unite and lead', to 'divide and rule'.

Revival of Multinationalist Objectives and New Qualifications, January-August 1918

As the war entered its endgame in 1918, German civilian and military planners reluctantly returned to a multinational imperial paradigm for securing strategic interests in Congress Poland. After the political situation in Warsaw stabilized in late 1917, German imperial leadership generally recommitted to plans for a multinationalist and federalist German-Polish union. They did so in the belief that an autonomous Polish state, subordinated to German suzerainty, represented a plausible means of securing Germany's eastern frontier without inciting sustained

[794] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference with Ober Ost on Baltic Policy, 10-11 March 1918," 103.
[795] Ibid.

resistance from Polish nationalists. Their support derived from a flagging hope that the Polish state, and eventually the Polish nation, would regard a German-Polish union as legitimate, and would loyally fight to defend it. Civilian and, to some extent, even military leaders also still generally believed that alternative models promised greater strife and international opprobrium, for less strategic gain. After recovering from the crises of 1917, therefore, the renewed commitment of German policy-makers to a basically multinationalist strategy in Poland remained surprisingly robust. In the spring of 1918, as Berlin's confidence in Germany's imminent military victory swelled, the prospect of federalist and multinationalist imperial harmony functioned as a high barrier to the adoption of nationalizing imperial strategies, especially radical measures like ethnic cleansing.

But internal policy debates over the particulars of imperial strategy for Poland simultaneously reveal how the crises of 1917 had permanently damaged German authorities' trust in the loyalty, honesty, and reliability of Polish actors and the Polish state. Though Berlin ultimately structured their war aims in Congress Poland around the realization of a German-Polish union, the events of 1917 effectively reopened the debate between nationalizing and multinational paradigms of imperial management that had been effectively closed since the spring of 1916. While no new clashes between Warsaw and the GGW dramatically shook Berlin's confidence in multinational stability to the same degree as the Oath Crisis, smaller confrontations and acts of Polish self-assertion continued to wear down German trust in the prospective reliability of the Polish state. Until the end of the war a faction of imperial policy-makers would continue to demand the fortification of Germany's eastern frontier through the nationalization of space, either as a contingency in case the German-Polish union failed, or as the centerpiece of imperial strategy. Though many officials and agencies resisted these proposals, virtually all German policy-makers supported at least some measures to attenuate Polish autonomy, ensure German control over Poland, or prophylactically weaken the Polish state. Revised plans for a German-Polish union in 1918 increasingly focused on dragooning Polish obedience and deprioritized negotiation with Polish elites.

1918 also saw the continued deterioration of public support for multinationalism as a paradigm of imperial management. Though 1918 lacked any unqualified catastrophes in Berlin-Warsaw relations, the German Empire also failed to secure any highly visible successes in building a German-Polish union which might have revitalized the German public's faith in the project. Intellectuals who had long supported multinational union between Germany and Poland vented their frustration with apparent Polish intransigence, or sought new ways to reinforce German control over the Polish state. Some even abandoned their previous support. Proponents of nationalizing imperialism amplified their opposition to a German-Polish union.

In January 1918 German leaders continued to debate the particulars of German imperial strategy in Poland, and the OHL and *Reichsleitung* sharply disagreed over the extent and nature of annexations required to secure the German Empire's eastern frontier. The balance of opinion, however, once again supported the creation of a German-Polish union as the core of Berlin's war aims in East Central Europe. Reports from Warsaw indicating the improving political situation in the GGW had by this point restored faith in the plausibility of a German-Polish union. In late 1917 Nethe reported that the mutineers from July had proven far less politically united than they had initially appeared. Following internment, their German guards had discovered that Polish officers had never even asked many of the enlistees if they wanted to take the oath. When offered the opportunity to swear a service-oath individually, 1080 of the 3250 prisoners had agreed. At this point "radical elements" among the prisoners had apparently attempted to dissuade them from cooperation via "verbal abuse" and physical violence ("brawls").[796] To Nethe and the GGW, this suggested that anti-German Polish nationalism might yet be a paper-tiger; less popular or rigidly hostile to the German Empire than the July mutiny had made it seem. On 1 January 1918, Ludendorff confirmed the OHL's renewed support for a German-Polish union by endorsing the project in a speech to the Bundesrat.[797] The major agencies of the German Empire once more

[796] Nethe, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 29 December 1917," 214.
[797] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 491.

agreed on a fundamentally multinationalist strategy of imperial control in Poland.

With the blessing of Berlin and the OHL the GGW continued its efforts to build a cooperative Polish government with some measure of popular legitimacy. In January 1918 the Regency Council had proposed assembling a new State Council to function as a sort of constitutional assembly.[798] The RAI quickly approved the proposal and the GGW authorized the Regency Council to move forward.[799] A 9 February law legally established the 110-member State Council, and set procedures for selecting its representatives. 55 were to be chosen by Poland's recently established district and city assemblies. 43 representatives, selected by the Regency Council itself, were meant to assure the GGW of its own indirect influence over constitutional questions. The remaining twelve seats would be filled by the rector's of Warsaw's colleges, and representatives of Poland's various religious communities, including six Roman Catholic Bishops.[800] The GGW surely hoped that the intellectual and spiritual elites of this last body would bend to the interests of the German Empire.

Multinational imperialism was more fragile in 1918, and policy-makers were less willing to trust that Poles would either actively collaborate with, or even passively accept, German leadership. In the same report in which he identified disunity among the Polish mutineers, Nethe warned that the GGW should show no leniency to those prisoners who continued to refuse the service-oath. They could not be released, as they were sure to sabotage the occupation.

> Even today the danger exists, that those Legionaires, who are absolutely committed to the socialist idea and who would not give up their position, can provoke political unrest in the country after their release, and could even sabotage railways and munitions- and supply-depots.[801]

Though hopeful that the GGW could exploit fractures in the nationalist movement, Nethe also worried that Legionnaires still enjoyed mass popularity in occupied-Poland. Indeed, they remained popular enough that the Regency Council still refused to publically denounce the mutiny.[802] Even vocal supporters of multinationalist policy voiced concerns about the political climate in Poland. In one memorandum Lerchenfeld expressed significant reservations about the high cost and questionable value of investing in a Polish national army. Given the "growing hostility towards Germany" in Poland, he warned that a Polish army might "turn its weapons against us" or incite popular resistance, much as the Polish Legions already had.[803]

By January 1918, most influential policy-makers in the GGW, OHL, and *Reichsleitung* agreed that Germany's regional security required more substantial guarantees. After November 1917, imperial planners proceeded on the widely-shared assumption that Germany would annex some amount of Polish territory, and that Berlin would aim to permanently secure this space via Germanization. Policy-discussions therefore focused on exactly how much territory was necessary to fortify Germany's border with Poland, and what policies of homogenization would achieve meaningful gains in German security without sabotaging the larger German objective of a German-Polish union. The OHL championed claims for large annexations, and pushed for aggressive policies of Germanization. However, the renewed prospect of a stable German-Polish union had again raised the opportunity-cost of annexations and germanization, and civilian officials once more balked at permanently alienating Polish national opinion. They advised more limited annexations and less intrusive policies of homogenization.

Kries's successor as Chief of Administration for the GGW, Dr. Max von Sandt, had tried to restrain the extent of annexationist claims and the intensity of nationalizing ethnic management, but he objected to neither in principle. In a 2 January letter to the RAI, Sandt declined to contest the logic or desirability of creating a "reliable" ethnically German population

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[798] Theodor Lewald, "Letter to the General Staff, 17 January 1918," January 17, 1918, 142, R43/5124, BArch.
[799] Ibid.
[800] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 203.
[801] Nethe, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 29 December 1917," 215.
[802] Ibid.
[803] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Frage der Heeresbildung," Dezember 1917, 210, R1501/119831, BArch.

within annexed Polish territory, instead only questioning whether this could be achieved at a reasonable political cost.[804] There was insufficient Russian state property in Congress Poland, Sandt noted, to resettle any significant portion of Polish peasants in these areas onto parcels of land further eastward.[805] Even if Germany somehow maximized the number of Poles resettled from the proposed border-strip into the Kingdom of Poland, the demographic makeup of the border-strip would remain, effectively, Polish. At most, Sandt estimated that the percentage of German speakers would increase marginally to 7.16% of the population. Conversely, Polish-speakers would continue, under perfect conditions, to constitute *at least* 81% of the population. Germanization via resettlement, he concluded, could only produce a tiny and embattled German minority in annexed territories, and would surely provoke the "resistance" of the Polish government.[806] Only "coercive resettlement", Sandt explained, could effectively Germanize annexed Polish territories. But he considered this option unthinkable.[807]

This rather muddling position on Germanization roughly characterized the views of the Prussian Government and the *Reichsleitung* in January 1918. The Prussian *Staatsministerium*, presuming that nobody was seriously considering mass expulsions, expressed concern that Germany would not be able to maintain control over the territories now claimed by the OHL. These, Prussian ministers warned, would introduce 2.5 million new Polish-speakers into the German Empire, destabilizing the domestic political balance of power.[808] The Kaiser, Chancellery, and even some high-ranking army commanders harbored similar concerns that no realistic policy of ethnic management would be able to stabilize German control over large annexations without alienating the Kingdom of Poland. In a 2 January Crown Council meeting, General Hoffmann had therefore advised seizing a much smaller amount of Polish territory than the OHL proposed. His proposed annexations would encompass roughly 100,000 Polish-speakers, hopefully reducing the intensity of Polish anger the act would provoke. The Kaiser ultimately agreed to this reduced schedule of annexations.[809]

This set off a sustained debate between the *Reichsleitung* and OHL over the scale of annexations in Poland and the methods that the German Empire would employ to govern the region. When first presented with the Hoffmann proposal, Ludendorff and Hindenburg dramatically threatened to resign unless the Kaiser reversed his decision.[810] This effectively tabled the issue, but the *Reichsleitung* continued to quietly draw back from the large schedule of annexations briefly envisioned in late 1917. On 17 January, the Chancellery reassured the Prussian *Staatsministerium* that, despite the OHL's vocal demands, the Kaiser remained firmly in control of the situation and would not allow Hindenburg and Ludendorff to dictate terms.[811] Hertling further assured the Prussian government that there was still no firm consensus on between the Chancellery and the OHL on the extent of annexations to be pursued in Poland.[812]

Hertling convened a conference of military and civilian leaders on 22 and 23 January to clarify official policy towards border annexations.[813] On the first day of the meeting participants reached near unanimous consensus regarding the necessity of at least some annexations to fortify Germany's border with Poland. They further agreed that Germanization of this border-strip was essential to ensure Berlin's control over the region. As a result, methods of nationalization were once again seriously discussed, including 'population exchanges', and outright ethnic cleansing. Undersecretary Lewald opened the meeting by faithfully relaying Sandt's earlier conclusions

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[804] Max von Sandt, "Letter to State Secretary Wallraf, 2 January 1918," January 2, 1918, 111, R43/5124, BArch.
[805] Ibid.
[806] Ibid.
[807] Ibid.
[808] Prussian Staatsministerium, "Minutes of Meeting in the Royal Staatsministerium, 17 January 1918," 76.
[809] Ibid., 76–77; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 131; Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 482.
[810] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 131.
[811] Prussian Staatsministerium, "Minutes of Meeting in the Royal Staatsministerium, 17 January 1918," 77.
[812] Ibid.
[813] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 132; Chancellery, "Request for OHL to Attend Conference in the RAI on 22 January 1918," January 14, 1918, 108, R43/5124, BArch.

regarding the practical implausibility of these aggressive options.[814] State Secretary Wallraf, Lewald further explained, considered it "necessary" to at least make an "attempt for a strengthened settlement of Germans in the border-territories", though the RAI agreed that coercive expulsions seemed implausible.[815]

A vocal faction, led by the representatives of the OHL, forcefully contested this position, arguing that a large border-strip was necessary to secure Germany from Polish ambitions, and that only the aggressive Germanization of this space could ensure Berlin's permanent control. Military leaders reintroduced longtime advocates of nationalizing imperialism into policy-discussions over Poland lend their position intellectual credibility. Hugo Ganse, the president of the Prussian Settlement Commission, insisted that "we need a purely German border-land" because the "greater-Polish convictions" of Polish nationalists effectively precluded lasting multinational harmony. The Polish state, he argued, would continue to organize and fund the nationalist subversion of Prussian territory until Berlin effectively removed their demographic claims to it.[816] If "expropriation" were impossible, Ganse insisted that Berlin find some other method of drumming Polish residents out of the border-strip.[817] Friedrich von Schwerin was also invited to the conference to promote a hard line for Polish policy. Berlin, he stated ominously, must free itself from all "sentimentaliy" when confronting the Polish "danger" to its own territory.[818] He too endorsed a Germanized border-strip, and suggested using the creation of military training grounds as a legal pretext for dispossessing and expelling Polish residents.[819]

These were all tired arguments and old ideas, but the OHL's support revitalized them. After the crises of 1917, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had lost patience with Poland, and believed that the threat of Polish nationalism to the German Empire warranted both annexations and aggressive policies of Germanization. At the 22 January conference, one military commander argued that the "struggle of nationalities between Germany and Poland would be more intense than ever after the war". Because the "mortal enmity of the Poles against us is certain", he argued that Berlin should in no way restrain its efforts to Germanize the border-strip.[820] General Major von Bartenwerffer, the OHL's official representative at the conference argued that Germanizing annexations in Poland, whether through "population exchanges", "expulsions", or intensive ethnic German "settlement", broadly "accorded with military interests".[821] "We need the border-strip, and it must be German," in one way or another.[822] In the next war, Bartenwerffer stated bluntly, Germany could not tolerate the risk posed by Polish residents behind the German front.[823] He therefore endorsed the state-sponsored colonization of annexations by ethnic German settlers, and further insisted that Berlin should not "shrink" from the possibility of "coercive population exchanges".[824] Bartenwerffer specifically took up Schwerin's proposal for establishing massive army exercise grounds and artillery ranges to expropriate large swathes of Polish land.[825]

Distrust of the Polish government even led some members of the GGW leadership to tentatively endorse the proposed Germanization of the border-strip. Beseler's Chief of Staff, and the GGW's representative at the conference, Lieutenant Colonel Nethe, stated frankly his belief that Germany could not expect a friendly relationship with the Kingdom of Poland.[826] He reported that his months of experience in maintaining order in occupied-Poland had convinced him that the GGW had largely failed to win Polish sympathies for a German-Polish union.

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[814] Reichskanzlei, "Protokoll: Konferenz im Reichsamt des Innern vom 22 Januar 1918 über die Frage der Besiedlung eines Grenzstreifens von Polen," January 22, 1918, 114, R43/5124, BArch.
[815] Ibid., 114–15.
[816] Ibid., 116.
[817] Ibid.
[818] Ibid., 117.
[819] Ibid.
[820] Ibid.
[821] Ibid., 115.
[822] Ibid.
[823] Ibid.
[824] Ibid.
[825] Ibid., 118.
[826] Ibid., 115–16.

> The old hatred of the Poles for the Germans has only been reinvigorated by the war; the requisitions, internment, and similar military necessities were hard felt… the Poles will hate us, so long as we hold Silesia, Posen, and West Prussia… Even so moderate a man as Minister President Kucharzewski expresses himself in a greater-Polish sense [*im großpolnischen Sinne*]."[827]

Nethe believed that the hardships of war had only reinforced popular hostility towards the German Empire in Poland. Even if Polish elites could reshape this national sentiment, Nethe concluded that there was no viable political faction that Berlin could rely upon to advance German interests in Warsaw. With Polish antipathy already so sharp, Nethe saw little risk that annexations and Germanization might further harm the German-Polish relationship. Nethe's tacit endorsement of homogenization, directly in conflict with the Governor General's own views on occupation policy, demonstrates that Beseler's ability to produce a broad multinationalist consensus among his subordinates was crumbling under the pressure of repeated political crises.

At the conference the civilian agencies of the German Empire continued to support annexations in Poland, and principally endorsed the eventual Germanization of these territories. However, they balked at proposals for ethnic cleansing and, in view of the practical difficulties associated with nationalizing space, wanted to restrain the scale of annexations. Even Privy Councilor Conze, representing the Prussian Interior Ministry, counseled restraint. He agreed that a Germanized border-strip constituted a vial necessity for imperial security, but his office opposed "coercive expropriation" of Polish residents to achieve this.[828] The Foreign Office similarly advised against ethnic cleansing, warning that expulsions would provoke an international outcry.[829] Wilhelmstraße did not, however, object to the aim of a Germanized border-strip. While the civilian agencies accepted "that the Germanization of the border-strip is essential military reasons" and should be "emphatically" pursued, they agreed that coercive expulsions would "hardly be possible".[830] The first day of the conference concluded on this note.

Nonetheless, conference discussions over the legal status of annexed Polish territory reveals the general shift among Policy-makers towards a more disciplinary approach to ethnic management. On 23 January the assembled military and civilian officials contemplated what administrative structures Berlin would erect to govern the border-strip in the long term, and what claims to citizenship in the German Empire its residents would be able to exercise. While civilians had balked at ethnic cleansing and other aggressive programs of Germanization, they now broadly agreed with their colleagues in the army that imperial security required special military administration of this territory.[831] Bartenwerffer clarified that annexations in Poland could under no circumstances be incorporated into the "federal German Empire".[832] He instead suggested establishing an interim "special Prussian administration in the border-strip in the form of a Prussian colonial territory", for at least the first ten years after the war.[833] By establishing a quasi-colonial administrative framework for the territory, Germany could effectively deny the rights and protections of citizenship to the local population. Residents would not be able to vote for the *Reichstag* or the Prussian *Landtag*, preventing any sudden expansion in Polish electoral influence. Berlin could block Polish-speakers from naturalizing or even immigrating into the German Empire proper. The residents of the border-strip would live in an extra-constitutional space, subject to policies imposed autocratically from Berlin, and administered by a permanent military occupation. Without legal inhibitions, Berlin would be free to modulate its policies of ethnic management at will.

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[827] Ibid., 116.
[828] Ibid., 117.
[829] Ibid., 118.
[830] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in the RAI, Regarding the Polish Border-Strip, 23 January 1918," January 23, 1918, 120, R43/5124, BArch.
[831] Ibid., 122.
[832] Ibid., 123.
[833] Ibid.

Few had been willing to consider similar proposals in 1916. But the idea now appealed to many policy-makers in part because it did not commit Berlin to any particular policy of Germanization, but left all options open for future consideration. If the German government later decided that ongoing nationalist subversion warranted more intensive colonization, or even ethnic cleansing, there would be no legal or political obstacles to implement these policies in the border-strip. This "sort of military-dictatorship" received scattered support from around the table on 23 January.[834] Privy Councilor Dr. Schulze of the RAI gave unqualified support to this formulation.[835] The Foreign Office representative to the conference opposed structuring the border-strip as a Prussian "colonial-land", believing this would inhibit Reichstag approval. He instead suggested giving the annexed territories a unique administrative status as a special military zone, which would grant Berlin additional latitude in matters of ethnic management.[836]

The two-day conference concluded by resolving to further study land-ownership and demography in Polish border-regions, and to contemplate potential structures of governance in newly annexed territories. On 24 January, the OHL followed up by sending the Chancellery a map detailing new proposals for annexations. The army leadership actually backed down, suggesting a compromise border strip between the OHL's original expansive proposals, and the Kaiser's more minimal demands of 2 January 1918.[837] But in a 4 February conference in the Prussian *Staatsministerium*, Hertling criticized the scale of even this compromise border-strip, arguing that it would incite Polish outrage as a new partition.[838]

Early 1918 debates among the civilian and military leadership of the German Empire over the scale of a border-strip, and the methods to govern it, demonstrate how fundamentally the crises of 1917 had altered policy-makers' confidence in the potential reliability of the future Polish state. The relaxation of tensions between Berlin and Warsaw in late 1917 had indeed renewed imperialists' hopes of forging a durable and cohesive German-Polish union. However, across the board, policy-makers now agreed that the German Empire required more substantial independent security guarantees than previously thought. Virtually all policy-makers wanted the German Empire to annex more substantial territories in Poland to militarily shield strategically important German territory from Polish betrayal. They also favored more aggressive policies of ethnic management to secure this territory, either through political repression, or nationalization. The OHL pressed the most forceful agenda, badgering and blackmailing the *Reichsleitung* to claim a truly massive swathe of Congress Poland and to permanently remove the threat of Polish subversion through aggressive nationalization. Civilian agencies balked at the scale and intensity of the military's ambitions. They attempted to restrain the size of the border-strip, and associated proposals for ethnic cleansing in part because they did not consider these feasible, in part because they seemed shocking and radical, and in part because they did not want to scuttle to possibility of incorporating Poland into stable military and political union with the German Empire. Still, the Chancellery, Foreign Office, and RAI sympathized with the OHL's burgeoning distrust of the Kingdom of Poland. Civilian policy-makers therefore generally agreed with the idea of more expansive annexations than those envisioned in 1916, and likewise wanted to ensure Berlin's more rigorous and autocratic authority in these territories, through special military administration.

Negotiations to conclude the war with Russia at Brest-Litovsk only complicated an already contentious relationship between Berlin and Warsaw. Germany had declined to invite a delegation from the Kingdom of Poland to the negotiations. Inviting a Polish plenipotentiary would have been incongruent with Berlin's long-term policy of establishing suzerainty over the Polish state, as it would have set a precedent for an independent Polish foreign policy. Still, Berlin's refusal to include even an advisory representative of the Regency Council at negotiations offended Poles and stoked fears that resulting treaties might allocate Polish

[834] Ibid.
[835] Ibid., 124.
[836] Ibid., 123–24.
[837] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 133.
[838] Ibid., 134.

territorial claims to other parties. The Regency Council had accordingly issued a public protest at their exclusion from negotiations, expressing its "justified wish" to represent itself at Brest-Litovsk for the "defense of the vital interests of the Polish nation".[839] The declaration had further warned that the Regency Council would refuse to recognize any decisions regarding the borders of Poland made at Brest-Litovsk.[840]

Warsaw was right to worry. On 9 February 1918, the Central Powers concluded a treaty with the government of the Ukrainian republic which had recently declared independence from Russia. In order to secure desperately needed supplies of grain and favorable influence in the new state, the Central Powers had awarded the city of Chełm and its hinterland to Ukraine.[841] The Chełm region had initially constituted the southeastern rim of Congress Poland. It had long been a site of contest between Polish nationalists and the Russian imperial bureaucracy. St. Petersburg had undertaken intensive effort to dilute the influence of Polish aristocrats in the region. After 1863, Russia had also attempted to roll back Catholic influence by forcing the conversion of local Uniates to Russian Orthodoxy.[842] In 1912, Russian administrative reform had finally partitioned Chełm from the Lublin governorate and separated it from the Vistula provinces altogether. Polish nationalists, however, regarded Chełm as an essential component of Poland.

The publication of the treaty provoked immediate and widespread opposition against this "fourth partition" of Poland.[843] In response to the treaty, Józef Haller led the 2nd Polish Auxiliary Corps in mutiny against the Austro-Hungarian army, marching his 1,500 men into contested Ukrainian territory to link up with Polish veterans of the Tsarist army.[844] In Berlin, Polish representatives like Korfanty, Seyda, and Trampczynski excoriated the treaty in the halls of the Reichstag and Prussian House of Representatives.[845] Across the Kingdom of Poland, the loss of Chełm provoked widespread and turbulent demonstrations, including a general strike and riots in Warsaw, and notable disturbances in Częstochowa, Sosnowiec, and Łódź.[846] The Warsaw city council pledged to seek Poland's independence.[847] On 12 February, Poland's Minister President sent a note to the Ukrainian Peoples' Republic, claiming that Poland's absence from the peace negotiations invalidated the assignment of Chełm to Ukraine. The Regency Council therefore requested direct bilateral negotiations to settle the issue.[848] Berlin, of course, could not permit this to happen, not only because it would flout Germany's role as arbiter of Eastern Europe, but again because it would establish a precedent of independent Polish foreign policy. Unable to restore Chełm to the Kingdom of Poland, but unwilling to accept responsibility for its loss, Kucharzewski soon resigned.[849]

The German public broadly interpreted Polish outrage over the loss of Ukraine as unjustified. Given their view that Poles had consistently refused to cooperate and compromise with the German Empire, Polish demands for territory were met with scorn. Critics of Germany's multinationalist strategy used the outpouring of vitriol from Poland to substantiate their claims that Polish national demands were insatiable and uncompromising. Now a conservative representative in the Prussian House of Representatives, Wolfgang von Kries criticized the apparent "sentiment against the Central Powers shared by all of Polandom" in the wake of the treaty with Ukraine, arguing that it proved the German Empire could trust neither the Polish nation, nor the government in Warsaw.[850] Rather than dismantling Germany's "levees against the

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[839] Regentschaftsrat, "Polnische Regierungserklärung über Staatlichkeit und Friedensfrage," February 4, 1918, 158–59, R1501/119793, BArch.
[840] Ibid., 159.
[841] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 203–4.
[842] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 194.
[843] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 204.
[844] Ibid.
[845] Ibid., 205; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 152.
[846] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 207.
[847] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 196.
[848] Minister President of Poland, "Letter to the Rada of the Ukrainian People's Republic, 12 February 1918," February 12, 1918, 29–30, N30/25, BArch.
[849] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 206.
[850] Posener Tageblatt, "Die ‚alten Träume'," February 17, 1918, 218, R1501/119793, BArch.

greater-Polish movement" for such a dubious imperial project, Kries demanded the "continuation of the [Prussian] settlement work".[851] The *Posener Tageblatt* celebrated Kries's prominent defection from multinationalism and adamant stand against imperial indulgence of Polish nationalism, arguing that the GGW's effort to reconcile the German Empire and the Polish nation "has already failed".[852] Polish outrage over the loss of Chełm , the paper emphasized, only proved that Germany would never be able to satisfy Polish nationalists, who dreamed of "building their pan-Polish empire on the rubble of the German Empire".[853]

By now, many supporters of multinational union with Poland were too exhausted to energetically defend the project. Friedrich Meinecke had grown disappointed with Polish elites' apparent unwillingness to collaborate with Germany and disillusioned with the proclamation of Polish statehood. Having already promised Polish statehood, Meinecke complained that, unfortunately, the German Empire "must, in the future, always reckon with an autonomous Polish national will, which will never be convenient and compliant to us".[854] Believing that the German Empire had painted itself into a corner, Meinecke still considered efforts to establish German suzerainty over an autonomous Polish state to be the "least evil" option available to Germany in Poland.[855] However, given the obvious unreliability of a Polish state, Meinecke now demanded additional guarantees of German security. In particular, he wanted the military convention between Berlin and Warsaw to include Germany's permanent "right of occupation" for fortresses along the Narew line.[856] In essence, he wanted to establish a shadow-occupation in the Kingdom of Poland, a system of fortresses prepared to defend the German Empire from a Polish betrayal, and advanced posts for military expeditions to punish disloyalty.

Paul Rohrbach's response to the Chełm debacle revealed his declining faith that a Polish protectorate would positively contribute to the German Empire's strategic security. Developments in Poland raised "serious concerns" for him.[857] While conceding some errors on Berlin's part, Rohrbach inveighed against Polish political leaders for hesitating to build a Polish army, and for failing to earn the trust of the German Empire by vigorously renouncing claims to the "Polish regions of the German Empire".[858] Rohrbach's rhetoric shifted dramatically. Abandoning his previous vision of a German-Polish union as a mutually advantageous security federation, Rohrbach now considered Germany's monopoly of influence over Poland indispensible to diplomatically isolate the potential rival. Abandoning efforts to establish suzerainty now would be a "disastrous mistake" as this would ensure Poland's place as the new "Serbia" of Eastern Europe.[859] Still hoping that the German-Polish union might yet develop into a stable and productive imperial structure, Rohrbach suggested keeping the option of Polish eastward expansion open to entice Warsaw's cooperation.[860]

Hans Delbrück also reconsidered his attitudes towards German imperial policy in Poland following the treaty with Ukraine. He ultimately continued to support the creation of an autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire. He even promoted the expansion of the Poland into White Ruthenia. Nonetheless he confessed to having serious doubts about the advisability of integrating Poland under German suzerainty.[861] After the failure of Poland to field a national army and subsequent political conflicts, Delbrück sympathized with the German public's apparent lack of confidence in Polish loyalty.[862] As Polish politicians continued to sketch fantastic plans for the incorporation of Posen and Danzig into the

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[851] Ibid.
[852] Ibid.
[853] Ibid., 219.
[854] Friedrich Meinecke, "Volksbund und Vaterlandspartei," in *Politische Schriften und Reden*, vol. II, Friedrich Meinecke: Werke (Darmstadt: Siegfried Toeche-Mittler Verlag, 1958), 241.
[855] Ibid.
[856] Ibid.
[857] Paul Rohrbach, "Der Eisgang im Osten," *Deutsche Politik* 3 (March 1, 1918): 259.
[858] Ibid., 263.
[859] Ibid.
[860] Ibid.
[861] Hans Delbrück, "Polen und die Ukraine," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 171 (February 23, 1918): 28.
[862] Ibid., 29–30.

Polish state, Delbrück found it reasonable to worry that Poles might "turn against their liberator" or even cooperate with Germany's international rivals.[863] It was natural for Germans to ask "Why should we help the Poles found a powerful empire, as they are our future enemies?".[864] Mistrust of Warsaw, Delbrück noted, at least partly explained Berlin's willingness to allocate contested territories like Chełm to other countries.[865]

On 13 February Wilhelm Feldman, the Polish publicist and longtime proponent of German-Polish reconciliation, denounced the loss of Chełm as a "new partition of Poland" and signaled that he would likely withdraw his support for German-Polish cooperation.[866] He further accused the German Empire of persistently failing to earn Polish trust.[867] This was too much for Friedrich Naumann, who publicly retorted that Poles were completely unjustified in their indignation over Chełm.[868] Naumann conceded Berlin's own mistakes in Poland: its to quickly establish institutions of national autonomy, the ambiguity of Poland's future borders, and even its unwillingness to bring a Polish delegation to Brest-Litovsk.[869] However, Naumann proceeded to accuse Polish nationalists of categorically worse betrayals of German confidence. He accused nationalist politicians in Congress Poland of carrying out private negotiations with Entente powers.[870] He argued that speeches by prominent politicians in Galicia, the Kingdom of Poland, and the *Ostmark*, appearing to claim Prussian territory naturally reinforced German "doubts" that a Polish government would honor its agreements with the German Empire.[871] Indeed, Naumann worried that even Polish Prussians no longer felt loyalty to the German Empire and that most, if not all, of Prussia's Polish minority secretly desired a "declaration of war" against Germany.[872] He warned that Polish irredentism now constituted a "European danger and threat to [future] peace" which nobody should take lightly.[873]

Naumann continued to support Germany's commitment to the "policy of November 1916". However, if the Polish state wanted a good relationship with Berlin he demanded Warsaw's immediate renunciation of any claims to Prussian territory, "irredentist endeavors", or "subversions" of German imperial integrity.[874] Moreover, he established conditions, which he felt could justify the annexation of Polish territory by the German Empire.

> Poles can only demand respect for their borders from Germany if they allow no remaining doubt, that the new state could behave like Serbia did against Austria-Hungary.[875]

Naumann also quietly encouraged the German occupation to reassert control in Warsaw, suggesting that the GGW should work with the Regency Council to purge the Polish bureaucracy of uncooperative nationalist elements.[876] Naumann, therefore, remained committed to multinational imperialism, yet even he voiced growing doubts in Polish fidelity, and therefore sanctioned the application of a greater degree coercion by German authorities.

GGW officials noted the German public's deteriorating confidence in multinationalist policy and leveraged the troubled atmosphere in Germany to pressure Polish leaders into compliance. On 22 February, for instance Hutten-Czapski warned Lubomirski that the Polish

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[863] Ibid.
[864] Ibid., 30–31.
[865] Ibid., 32.
[866] Friedrich Naumann, "Polnische Zukunft," *Die Hilfe* 9, no. 24 (February 28, 1918): 968; Wilhelm Feldman, "'Vor der neuen Teilung Polens' offenes Schreiben an Dr. Friedrich Naumann," February 13, 1918, 45, N30/37, BArch.
[867] Feldman, "'Vor der neuen Teilung Polens' offenes Schreiben an Dr. Friedrich Naumann," 46.
[868] Naumann, "Polnische Zukunft," 968.
[869] Ibid., 968–70.
[870] Ibid., 968–72.
[871] Ibid., 969–72.
[872] Ibid., 969.
[873] Ibid., 973.
[874] Ibid., 971.
[875] Ibid.
[876] Ibid., 968.

government should carefully consider the impact of their actions on German public opinion. The German public urgently desired military security on their eastern border, he explained, and they needed to feel that they could trust Warsaw to fight alongside them, rather than against them. Hutten-Czapski lamented that if the TRS had only fielded a single army of even 80,000 men against the Russian Empire, everything might have been different now.[877] Instead the "uncertain attitude of the Poles, the lack of an expressly declared affiliation with the Central Powers, and the failure to declare war on the then Tsarist and essentially anti-Polish Russia" had all disillusioned Germans with the Polish state.[878] Provocative statements by the TRS and political parties had only transformed this "disappointment" into "bitterness".[879] He warned that German conservatives and National Liberals were already "constant and open opponents of an autonomous Polish state", but that the Kingdom of Poland was beginning to lose the confidence of the Center Party, FVP, and SPD. If the majority parties turned against Polish statehood, he warned, Berlin would abandon its efforts to establish an autonomous Kingdom of Poland.[880]

Polish outrage over Chełm did not, however, deeply affect the attitudes of German policy-makers. The German government had predicted that the allocation of Chełm to Ukraine would provoke anger in the Kingdom of Poland well before they announced the final provisions of the treaty. Hertling admitted as much in a note on 5 February.[881] The GGW had also long accepted that the Regency Council would vehemently denounce the surrender of Chełm to Ukraine, in order to preserve a modicum of popular legitimacy against constant attacks by the Endeks and the far left.[882] Indeed, the German government quietly welcomed the outpouring of Polish anger following the loss of Chełm, as they were convinced that Poles would direct most of their opprobrium against Austria-Hungary, for sanctioning the allocation of Chełm to Ukraine. German policy-makers wagered that the resulting wrath would finally convince Vienna that they could not expect to peaceably integrate the Kingdom of Poland into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They simultaneously hoped that it would finally disqualify an Austro-Polish solution as a viable alternative to a German-Polish union in the minds of Poles. With German suzerainty as a *fait accompli*, German imperialists believed that Polish elites would begin to cooperate more consistently with Berlin.

Events validated German predictions. By 22 February, Vienna considered its ambitions in Poland sufficiently untenable that Kaiser Karl again renounced all Austro-Hungarian claims to Poland during a meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm II at Bad Homburg.[883] Wilhelm II immediately reasserted Germany's plan to incorporate the Polish state into military and political union with the German Empire.[884] German sources in the GGL confirmed that anger among the population had flared against Vienna, whose willingness to hand Chełm to Ukraine had been taken as proof of Austria-Hungary's diplomatic "weakness" or even "unreliability". The "Austrian orientation" among Poles, the report continued, had consequently evaporated and, with no alternative options remaining, Polish elites now searched for a "*modus vivendi*" with Germany.[885] Surveillance of Warsaw's political class also noted the sudden burgeoning of a pragmatic "Berlin orientation". Politically active Poles now appeared convinced that only a "firm union with Germany" would "hinder" the further diminution of Polish territory, and possibly even secure Poland's ownership of White Ruthenia.[886] GGW officials therefore recorded mounting calls for the enthronement of a German prince as the King of Poland. On 28 February, the GGW happily reported to the Foreign

[877] Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, "Report to Hans Hartwig von Beseler on Discussions with Prince Lubomirski, 23 February 1918," February 23, 1918, 80, R1501/119674, BArch.
[878] Ibid., 81.
[879] Ibid.
[880] Ibid.
[881] Georg von Hertling, "Letter to Freiherr von Gruenau, 5 February 1918," February 5, 1918, 69, R43/2477, BArch.
[882] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to the Foreign Office, 3 February 1918," February 3, 1918, 175, R1501/119793, BArch.
[883] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 199.
[884] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 525.
[885] Oettingen, "Die Stimmung in Lublin nach Bekanntwerden des Brester Vertrags," February 20, 1918, 85, R1501/119674, BArch.
[886] "Bericht über Stadtverordnetensitzung in Warschau," March 1, 1918, 105, R1501/119674, BArch.

Office that, in light of the growing Bolshevist threat, the National Center had resolved to pursue "dependence on the Central Powers", and especial military attachment to the German Empire as the "strongest and best organized" of these powers.[887] They had even petitioned for the conclusion of a permanent military convention with Germany.[888] The Foreign Office noted that a separate party of Polish landowners and bourgeoisie had also reached an overwhelming consensus in support of a "close union with Germany".[889] On 10 March Ronikier approached the GGW as a representative of Poland's various Activist parties, and expressed their collective willingness to build a Polish state in "honorable and mutual understanding with the German people", so long as Warsaw received "assurances" regarding Poland's borders and the Kingdom of Poland retained a national army and an autonomous administration.[890] To German eyes, even the Endeks seemed to be accepting the inevitability of German suzerainty.[891]

GGW officials therefore considered Polish outrage and even the resignation of the Kucharzewski government acceptable costs, as the Chełm affair had finally convinced Polish political elites that Vienna was wither unwilling or unable to effectively defend the territorial interests of the Kingdom of Poland.[892] Proponents of multinationalism in the GGW therefore enjoined the German Empire to capitalize upon this opportunity and earn Polish trust and fidelity by immediately presenting a complete imperial agenda to Poland, which clearly delineated Poland's borders and future relationship with the German Empire.[893] Beseler viewed this as a potentially decisive moment. Not only had the traumatic loss of Chełm finally eliminated Austro-Hungarian competition, it had also chastised arrogant Polish nationalists and alerted them to the "hopelessness" of Greater-Polish delusions.[894] Beseler therefore sought the immediate realization of a German-Polish union through the nomination of a German prince to the Polish throne and the final conclusion of a "close military convention" with Poland which would grant the Kaiser supreme command over the Polish army in the event of war.[895] The Chełm affair, therefore, was broadly regarded as a positive development by German policy-makers, and indeed reinforced their confidence in Berlin's ability to establish a stable German-Polish union.

Consequently when representatives of the GGW, *Reichsleitung*, Prussian government, and OHL gathered in Berlin on 12 March to once again the discuss "securing a German border-strip in the east", they essentially ratified the decisions already reached during the January conference. The meeting confirmed that erecting a special military government to administer the border-strip would be necessary to guarantee German security in the annexations. But policy-makers again agreed that aggressive policies of Germanization and ethnic cleansing would incur excessive costs and would be practically implausible.[896] Chairing the meeting, Lewald severely doubted that the German Empire could effectively engineer even an ethnic German plurality in the border-strip, much less a majority. The simply wasn't enough available property in the affected territories to invite robust German settlement. Moreover, he argued that the creation of army training facilities, artillery railways, and strategic railways, would "hardly suffice" to "Germanize the border-strip" to any meaningful extent.[897] In light of the dubious prospects of success, Lewald saw no justification for incurring the probable costs associated with nationalizing ethnic management.[898] Though Kühlmann still doubted the proposed German-Polish

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[887] Oettingen, "Report to the Foreign Office, 28 February 1918," February 28, 1918, 74, R1501/119674, BArch.
[888] Ibid.
[889] Oettingen, "Report to the Foreign Office, 1 March 1918," March 1, 1918, 230, R1501/119793, BArch.
[890] Ronikier, "Statement on Behalf of the Activist Parties, 10 March 1918," March 10, 1918, 53, N30/25, BArch.
[891] "Bericht über Stadtverordnetensitzung in Warschau," 105.
[892] Oettingen, "Report to the Civil Administration of the GGW, 12 February 1918," February 12, 1918, 42–43, R1501/119674, BArch.
[893] Ibid., 44.
[894] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report to the Chancellery on Political Sentiments in the GGW, 4 March 1918," March 4, 1918, 50, N30/25, BArch.
[895] Ibid., 50–51.
[896] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in the RAI to Discuss the Border-Strip, 12 March 1918," March 12, 1918, 125, R43/5124, BArch.
[897] Ibid., 127.
[898] Ibid.

union, the Foreign Office similarly opposed policies of "immediate Germanization" as excessively costly.[899] Objections from military personnel at the meeting did not persuade other participants.[900]

Lewald did, however, note consensus among military and civilian representatives on 12 March that German security required the special military administration of annexed territories.[901] Following the meeting, imperial leadership began more serious study of how to ensure Berlin's ability to rigorously police, deter, and repress Polish nationalist activity in the border-strip without sabotaging relations with Warsaw or provoking a nationalist outcry. Chancellor Hertling tasked Wilhelm von Radowitz with sketching proposals for safely governing the Polish population of border annexations. Radowitz, who in August 1915 had been at least receptive to the idea of multinational imperialism in Poland, presented his suggestions in a 28 April memorandum to the RAI.[902] He proposed simply refusing to grant citizenship to Polish residents of annexed territories. Without the legal protections afforded by citizenship, Radowitz argued, Berlin would be legally permitted to apply harsher methods of ethnic management, including discriminatory land policies, expropriation, and even the expulsions, should these measures prove necessary in the future.[903] Denying the protections and legal recourse available to citizens would further ease the task of policing subversive Polish organizations.[904] Moreover, Radowitz argued that the threat of an iron-fisted response from Berlin would effectively deter Polish speakers from engaging in nationalist agitation, and might even encourage Polish leaders in Warsaw to cooperate with Berlin for the sake of their co-nationals across the border.[905] Radowitz hoped that Berlin would otherwise benevolently administer these new provinces. Indeed, he wanted to open service in the Prussian Army to Polish subjects, both to encourage their gradual Germanization and provide them with a path to full citizenship after proving their loyalty to the German Empire.

However, coordination by the FVP, Center Party, and SPD forced Berlin to step back from even this limited border-strip scheme. The majority parties all remained heavily invested in the multinationalist project in Poland, partly out of a principled rejection of annexations, partly for ideological reasons, and partly because prominent members still believed an autonomous Kingdom of Poland in union with the German Empire offered the best prospect of strategic security in eastern Europe. The balance of these three motives was different in each party. SPD representatives, for instance, were more interested in circumventing annexations. Center parliamentarians, on the other hand, tended to focus on the viability and relative advantages of multinationalism as an imperial strategy.

As representatives of the *Reichsleitung*, OHL, and GGW met in the Imperial Office of the Interior, Chancellor Hertling, Vice Chancellor Payer, and Foreign Office officials met with representatives of the Center, FVP, and SPD to discuss Germany's war aims. Constantin Fehrenbach presented the position of the Majority Parties to the imperial government. They offered support for "a political and economic alliance of the Polish state with the Central Powers", which must naturally regulate vital interests of war and peace.[906] He insisted that Germany immediately delineate the borders of the Polish state and assist Warsaw in organizing a powerful national army and an independent administration, all to safeguard the autonomy and integrity of the Polish nation.[907] Fehrenbach further demanded that Berlin and Warsaw both renounce any claims to each other's territories. The Majority Parties wanted no border-strip, but

[899] Ibid., 127–28.
[900] Ibid., 128.
[901] Ibid., 129.
[902] von Radowitz, "Letter to the State Secretary of the RAI, 28 April 1918," April 28, 1918, 16, R1501/119824, BArch.
[903] Ibid., 18–19.
[904] Ibid.
[905] Ibid.
[906] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference with Leadership of the Majority Parties in Reichskanzlerpalais, 12 March 1918," March 12, 1918, 110, R43/2477, BArch.
[907] Ibid., 110–11.

they would also broker no Polish claims to Posen. To avoid any ambiguity, Fehrenbach clarified the Majority Parties' belief that Germany's original policy in building a Kingdom of Poland would fully accord with their stance against annexations. Moreover, he argued that the recent show of cooperation by Poland's activist parties proved that Poles would accept military and political union with the German Empire.[908] Convinced that the new Polish state would reliably guard Germany's Eastern frontier, the Majority Parties' urged Berlin to expand the Kingdom of Poland eastward, as Beseler had originally proposed.[909] Fehrenbach assured the *Reichsleitung* that the Center Party, FVP, and MSPD would fully support a German-Polish union of this kind. Naumann, and David, also in attendance, confirmed this statement.[910]

Hertling responded that the *Reichsleitung* shared the foundational thinking on how to achieve German objectives in Poland. However, the Chancellor admitted that the imperial government differed with the Reichstag on the "difficult" question of Poland's borders.[911] Hertling's sought flexibility on the question of western annexations and eastern expansion. But the Majority Parties were resolved. Indeed, the Reichstag representatives flexed their muscles on this point. No deputy at the meeting bent to the Chancellor's suggestion. Eduard David even implicitly threatened the MSPD's continued support for war credits if the German Empire deviated from multinational policy in Poland.[912]

The central leadership of the Majority Parties perhaps overplayed their hand. Multinationalist parliamentarians like Erzberger, Naumann, and Fehrenbach presented a united front to the *Reichsleitung*, but the experiences of the past months had also taxed confidence in the fidelity of a Polish state among their parties' rank and file. As reported to the RAI in March, regional affiliates of the Center Party and FVP actually appeared to consider "sufficient border-corrections" necessary for the German Empire's future security, and were even willing to contemplate annexing up to the Warta line.[913] But Hertling did not want to provoke the Reichstag Majority Parties, whose continued support for the war was indispensible, and so he did not energetically resist their strict parameters for Polish policy. However, the Chancellor had no genuine interest in actually abandoning annexations along the Polish border, which he too considered necessary to secure Prussia from Varsovian treachery. Rather than using the Majority Parties' hardline to balance OHL demands, Hertling instead continued to quietly determine and pare down what annexations were absolutely indispensible for military security, and plan for their seizure. In a later meeting with the Prussian *Staatsministerium*, Hertling assured the assembled ministers that rumors that the Reichstag had pressured him to abandon the border-strip were misinformed. The Reichstag, he assured them, would not impede the prerogatives of the imperial executive to establish a protective border-strip.[914]

On 13 March the Kaiser convened a crown council at the Bellevue Palace to once again coordinate imperial policy towards Poland.[915] Though the crown council again confirmed Berlin's intention to build a multinational German-Polish union, the empire's leading civilian authorities and military commanders now did so with considerable reluctance, a new resolve to firmly command Warsaw, and on the condition of effective guarantees for the security of the German Empire against Polish betrayal. The Kaiser set the tone for the meeting by explaining that the foundation of Germany policy would be the creation of an autonomous Polish state in "sharp attachment to Germany, [with] conventions and treaties".[916] He still considered the provision of substantive autonomy to Poland necessary to enlist Polish acceptance of German suzerainty, and

[908] Ibid., 110.
[909] Ibid., 110–11.
[910] Ibid., 114.
[911] Ibid., 111.
[912] Ibid., 117.
[913] Landeshauptmann von Thaer, "Letter to Undersecretary of the RAI, 30 March 1918," March 30, 1918, 338, R1501/119823, BArch.
[914] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in the Prussian Staatsministerium, 22 March 1918," March 22, 1918, 127, R43/4a, BArch.
[915] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 118.
[916] Ibid.

Poles should therefore "handle their own matters as much as possible".[917] Wilhelm II further believed that Germany should soon nominate a candidate for the Polish throne, and suggested a prince of the house of Württemberg.[918]

Beseler took the crown council meeting as an opportunity to reassert his own control over the direction of imperial policy in Poland, and consolidate Berlin's commitment to a German-Polish union. The Governor General therefore presented his case that Polish national elites were finally beginning to cooperate with the GGW, and that Warsaw would eventually accept German suzerainty as legitimate. He admitted frankly that he understood his colleagues' frustration with Polish hesitation and intransigence and he even faulted Polish elites for repeatedly obstructing or even derailing the organization of their own state by holding a "form of political strike" to extract further concessions from Germany.[919] He now believed that the Polish national psyche suffered from an "incurable megalomania" which inspired ridiculous "fantasies of expansion".[920] Unfortunately this meant that there remained, "in Poland, still some enemies of Germandom".[921]

Despite Polish intractability, Beseler argued that multinationalism remained Berlin's only practical avenue for achieving lasting security in Eastern Europe.

> As you know, Polish reliability is very often doubted. In fact, one cannot rely on the promises of the Poles. The attempt, to achieve a sound pact with Poland, based on the actual community of vital interests [between Germany and Poland], must nonetheless be made.[922]

Germany could only hope to achieve strategic security and lasting stability in the region by attempting to "resolve the Polish question with the voluntary cooperation of the Poles".[923] Any other imperial strategy would definitely produce lasting and dangerous nationalist unrest.

The Governor General repeated that Germany's and Poland's shared strategic interests would ultimately bind the Kingdom of Poland to the German Empire. Despite previous and current frictions, Poles would soon realize that they depended on Germany's military umbrella. Beseler assured his fellow policy-makers that Poles would eventually accept German suzerainty, and regard the multinational union as legitimate, so long as Poland enjoyed robust political autonomy. Indeed, he argued that this evolution in Polish attitudes was already underway. The Bolshevik revolution appeared to have finally convinced Polish landowners that they needed German imperial protection.[924] After the Chełm debacle, he continued, support for the Austro-Polish solution was essentially dead.[925] Beseler happily cited Prince Lubomirski's recent offer of "complete union with Germany" as evidence for this claim that Poles were ready to accept German leadership.[926] In conversations with the Governor General, Lubomirski had further expressed the desire of "authoritative" Polish politicians for the nomination of a German regent and the conclusion of a "military convention" with the German Empire.[927] To finally enlist Polish collaboration, Beseler sought Berlin's authorization to assemble the final components of a skeleton Polish government with the authority to conclude treaties of union with the German Empire.[928]

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[917] Ibid.
[918] Ibid.
[919] Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," März 1918, 121, R43/2477, BArch.
[920] Ibid.
[921] Ibid.
[922] Ibid., 121–22.
[923] Ibid., 122.
[924] Ibid., 121.
[925] Ibid.
[926] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 119.
[927] Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 121.
[928] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 119; Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 121.

Confident that he could successfully establish a Polish state as a reliable protectorate of the Germane Empire, Beseler urged his colleagues to exercise restraint on the matter of annexing and Germanizing Polish territory. Once more, Beseler considered "territorial expansions" unnecessary if Germany were to "completely dominate the military and transport systems in Poland".[929] Once more he argued that suzerainty over dependable Polish state would shift Germany's de facto strategic frontier to Poland's eastern border, obviating most of the need to fortify Germany's own border. While annexations might afford some protection from Polish treachery, Beseler argued that extensive annexations were far more likely to alienate Polish nationalists, and turn the population of Poland into "our irreconcilable enemies".[930] He resolutely denounced any thought of expelling the Polish inhabitants of prospective annexations, and replacing them with German colonists. This would surely stoke Poles' "indignant opposition".[931] Both substantial annexations and the nationalizing models of ethnic management threatened to scuttle any hope of a stable and functional German-Polish union. A hostile Polish state would then become a center of anti-German nationalist conspiracy, a sponsor of irredentism in Prussia, and an acute threat to the German Empire.[932] Border-annexations, Beseler felt, were not worth these risks.[933] "A Poland, that is united [*verbündet*] with us and has a military convention with Germany, means better protection for us than a border-strip".[934] Beseler argued that seizing territory above the Bobr-Narew line and around Thorn would be "necessary and sufficient" to defend the German Empire from any "hostile army" moving through Poland.[935] Though these limited annexations in the north would still likely provoke Polish outrage, but Beseler believed the response would be manageable.

Beseler therefore continued to defend a German-Polish union as the most advantageous means of achieving imperial security in the east, and still believed that Poles could be made accept German suzerainty so long as they could see Berlin as defender of their own political autonomy. However, Beseler's statements at Bellevue also reveal that the Governor General now wanted to employ more coercive tactics to dragoon Polish acceptance of German leadership. In 1916, Beseler had believed that strategic self-interest alone would motivate Poles to regard multinational union as legitimate. Though he still thought collective security would form the long-term basis of multinational legitimacy, Beseler now considered it necessary to compel Warsaw's obedience in the short term. "We must therefore impose upon the Poles what is good for them, so to speak. Then they resign themselves and are satisfied".[936] The Governor General noted that a substantial portion of Polish trade flowed along the Vistula and could only reach global markets through Danzig's port. Germany, he suggested, could use its control over Poland's main economic artery to mandate compliance from Warsaw.[937]

In 1916, Beseler had predicted that the GGW would be able to enlist the support of key social, intellectual, and political elites, who would thereafter use their influence to convince the broader population of the benefits of military and political union with Germany. Beseler no longer considered Polish national elites so pliable. While a German-Polish union would still ultimately rely upon Polish collaboration, he now believed that there remained, "in Polish minds, some exuberances which we must combat".[938] Beseler acknowledged that even sympathetic Polish elites remained too independent and unpredictable for German purposes. He mentioned Ronikier's latest speech, which had included language suggesting that "Poland negotiates with us

[929] Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 123.
[930] Ibid.
[931] Ibid.
[932] Ibid., 121.
[933] Ibid., 123.
[934] Ibid.
[935] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 119; Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 120–22.
[936] Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 124.
[937] Ibid., 121.
[938] Ibid.

as equals".[939] Beseler believed that Polish elites would need to be humbled through new assertions of Germany's "political predominance" to establish Berlin's durable control over Warsaw.[940] Beseler therefore addressed his own doubts about Poland's ultimate fidelity to the German Empire by suggesting that Berlin more forcefully pressure Poland's leadership caste and clearly inscribe Germany's dominant status into the treaties of union with Poland.

Representatives of the major agencies of the *Reichsleitung* remained ambivalent towards a Polish protectorate, and skeptical as to its ultimate reliability. The Foreign Office delegate at Bellevue reported Kühlmann's skepticism of a German-Polish union and inclination towards an Austro-Polish solution.[941] Wallraf ultimately accepted Beseler's argument that multinational imperialism remained the best strategy available. He also opposed the expulsion of Polish residents from border annexations. However, given the "fickle" nature of the Polish character, and his doubts about Warsaw's fidelity, the State Secretary of the RAI emphasized the need for concrete defenses against Polish treachery, potentially through border-corrections.[942] Moreover, Wallraf considered multinationalism a provisional strategy contingent upon ongoing Polish cooperation. "It is possible," he stated, "that our Polish policy must also once again become sharper. That is, friendship with Poland remains an uncertain matter".[943]

Like Beseler, Wallraf also reimagined Germany's long-term relationship with Poland in more coercive terms. He wondered if a "stronger military convention" with Warsaw might itself be used to control the Polish state and ensure its reliability.[944] Prussia's War Minister latched on to this idea, arguing that the "military shackles" binding Poland to Germany "must be very tight".[945] Minister Drews similarly hoped that close political attachment to the German empire might be used to "mitigate" the "danger" represented by the "new Polish state".[946] This was a slight, but important rhetorical shift. Whereas German policy-makers had previously described military and political union with Poland primarily in terms of collective security against Russia, they now focused on using treaties of union to contain the Polish state and further project Germany's influence. To some extent, these had always been motives for multinational imperialism, and Berlin's monopoly over a common foreign policy had been considered indispensible in part to insure that Warsaw would not work with Germany's international rivals. In 1918, however, German policy-makers began to contemplate new mechanisms and amendments to treaties of union, which could reinforce Germany's legal authority to surveil, police, and command the Kingdom of Poland.

The Bellevue Conference therefore confirmed the German Empire's renewed commitment to a multinationalist imperial strategy in Poland. Though nobody showed particular optimism or enthusiasm for the project, not even Beseler, the conference dispelled any ambiguity that this would be the foundation of German imperial policy. German policy-makers did so partially because they hoped that Poland might eventually accept German suzerainty, and partially because the alternative solutions to the Polish-question seemed comparatively worse. Still, skepticism of Poland's eventual loyalty led officials to again consider how to mitigate the threat of Polish betrayal without dashing the prospect of eventual reconciliation and stable union. Moderate annexations remained on the table, and policy-makers began to imagine new mechanisms by which Berlin could compel Warsaw's obedience.

The meetings of 12 and 13 March 1918 failed to actually resolve the lingering question of the size of the prospective border-strip and the means by which Berlin would manage its population after the war. Sensing the discomfort of civilian agencies with extensive annexations and aggressive nationalization, and certainly aware that the Reichstag vehemently opposed these,

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[939] Ibid.
[940] Ibid., 122.
[941] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 119.
[942] Ibid.
[943] Reichskanzlei Presseabteilung, "Verhandlungsbericht über die Beratung vom 13. März 1918 vorm. Über die polnische Frage," 124.
[944] Ibid., 120–24.
[945] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Bellevue Palace, 13 March 1918," 119.
[946] Ibid.

multinationalists like Beseler were content to let the issue rest. Assuming the victorious conclusion of the war, time was on his side. He reasonably bet that ambiguity would resolve in favor of imperial restraint. With the successful conclusion of the war, the OHL would lose much of its leverage over decisions of imperial governance. For the same reasons, proponents of annexation and Germanization like Ludendorff and the Prussian War Minister, badgered the imperial government for precise clarification of the border-issues as soon as possible.[947]

Beseler, for his part, continued to advertise the GGW's successes in establishing a base of support and collaboration among Warsaw's various political factions and elites. In discussions with Hertling in late March, he gladly reported that the new Regency Council had approved the ascension of a Catholic German prince, most likely Duke Albrecht of Württemberg, to the Polish throne. They had further agreed to incorporate the Kingdom of Poland into a system of Central European alliances.[948] Beseler reported that he had been working with the Polish government on the specifics of future military treaties, and indicated that they would accept a military convention with Germany which recognized the Kaiser as the Polish army's supreme commander in times of war.[949]

Jan Steczkowski, Kucharzewski's Minister of Finance, was elected and confirmed as the new Minister President of Poland on 23 March.[950] Steczkowski had indicated to Hutten-Czapski that he would only accept the post under three conditions.[951] First, he demanded that the GGW continue to hand over administrative responsibilities to the Polish government. In particular he wanted the portfolios for finance, land regulation, and civilian rationing firmly in Polish hands.[952] Second, of "decisive importance" was the "rapid" formation of a Polish army, without which "the Polish government cannot exist". Steczkowski suggested that Polish military strength could be augmented by recognizing Polish-speaking units of the former Tsarist army, now straggling back to Congress Poland, as part of the "national Polish army".[953] Finally, he demanded the reassembly of Congress Poland, including the unification of the GGW and the GGL, and a reconsideration of Chełm's fate.[954]

The demands were reasonable. German officials had also long sought an end to the administrative partition of Congress Poland. Steczkowski's other two demands basically aimed to militarily guarantee the autonomy of the Polish state, formally close off the prospect of Germanization, and afford Warsaw at least some control over requisitions. The GGW indeed responded that it might be able to make some concessions on his first demand for the continued transfer of authority to the Polish government. By March 1918, however, virtually nobody in the GGW or imperial leadership wanted to assemble a large Polish army until the war had already ended and Warsaw had recognized German suzerainty.

Beseler felt that he and Steczkowski had arrived at an understanding of each other's positions. On 25 March 1918, he reported that in discussions with Steczkowski, Lubomirski, and Ostrowski regarding Germany's intentions for the Kingdom of Poland, the three leaders had agreed with Beseler that the future Polish King would be a Catholic German Prince.[955] Following the meeting, Beseler felt confident that the present Polish government was prepared to accept military and political union with the German Empire.

> …the aforementioned Polish statesmen seemed essentially to accept the main features of the future status and internal design of the Polish state, which I laid out

[947] Hermann von Stein, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 10 April 1918," April 10, 1918, 334, R1501/119823, BArch.
[948] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 209.
[949] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 200.
[950] Ibid., 205.
[951] Theodor Lewald, "Report on Steczkowski's Conditions for Appointment to Minister-President," April 1918, 138, R43/5124, BArch.
[952] Ibid.
[953] Ibid.
[954] Ibid., 139.
[955] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Confidential Report to Chancellor Hertling, 25 March 1918," March 25, 1918, 6–7, N30/16, BArch.

to them, quite without reservation…[956]

Beseler explained that he had confirmed for the Polish leaders that Berlin intended to conclude a military convention with Warsaw to bind Poland specifically to the German Empire.[957] He had further clarified that, while the Polish King would command the Polish army in times of peace, the military convention would grant the Kaiser the right to inspect the Polish army and to assume unified command in the event of war.[958] Despite knowing the basic outlines of Germany's imperial ambitions, Beseler happily reported that Steczkowski had still accepted the position of Minister-President. Beseler once more believed that the GGW had finally secured a Polish Minister-President and Regency Council, which Berlin could rely upon to draft treaties which "incontestably" laid the groundwork for a German-Polish union, and who would work to cultivate legitimacy for this union within the Polish nation.[959]

With success in sight, Beseler once again urged the *Reichsleitung* and OHL not to shoot multinationalist policy in the foot by demanding large annexations in Poland, or otherwise attempt to militarily contain Poland. Rather than surrounding the Kingdom of Poland in the east, he hoped that Berlin would still reconsider expanding Polish territory into White Ruthenia.[960] He also directly petitioned Berlin to drop its demands for even the Bobr-Narew line, the potential value of which he now regarded far less than the catastrophic political cost it might incur.[961]

Beseler and GGW officials also began detailed planning for how to effectively establish German suzerainty over the Kingdom of Poland in late March. As the federalist organization of the German Empire had inspired and shaped multinationalist proposals for Poland, GGW officials once again referred to the German constitution during this planning process. Beseler, for instance, reviewed the 1866 treaty establishing the North German Confederation, the 1866 treaty between Bavaria and Prussia, and the 1867 treaty between Prussia and the Arch-Duchy of Hesse.[962] The Prusso-Bavarian treaty in particular closely paralleled Beseler's framework for a German-Polish relationship.

However, caution was evident even in the optimistic efforts of GGW officials to flesh-out the details of a German-Polish union. Some of the GGW's most vehement early proponents of multinationalist policy had already departed from the occupation, renounced multinational policy, or both. Beseler still found active support in figures like Lerchenfeld and Glasenapp, who positively worked for the realization of a German-Polish union. Ernst von Glasenapp's case is particularly illuminating. Despite being responsible for maintaining order in Warsaw, the unrest and disappointments of the previous year had not convinced him that a German-Polish union was implausible or even inadvisable. He still considered binding an autonomous Polish state in "close union" with the German Empire to be indispensible to the future strategic security of both Germany and Poland.[963] However, Glasenapp acknowledged Germany's "most unfavorable experiences" during the occupation, including Piłsudski's mutiny and the "considerable influence" of the POW.[964] In light of these he considered it prudent to doubt whether a Polish army could be trusted to serve the German Empire, and he felt it was natural to worry that Warsaw might deploy its men against Germany.[965] Glasenapp therefore recommended delaying the actual formation of a Polish national army for several years, until Poland had proven itself a loyal protectorate of the German Empire.[966] To guarantee Warsaw's fidelity, Glasenapp also

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[956] Ibid., 6.
[957] Ibid., 7.
[958] Ibid.
[959] Ibid., 6.
[960] Ibid., 7.
[961] Ibid., 8.
[962] GGW, "Copies of Treaties Establishing the Norddeutsche Bund, the Alliance between Prussia and Bavaria, and the Alliance between Prussia and the Archduchy of Hesse," March 30, 1918, 145–49, N30/44, BArch.
[963] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Bericht: die politische Entwickelung in Polen nach Aufhebung der Okkupation, 10 April 1918," April 10, 1918, 11–12, R1501/119676, BArch.
[964] Ibid., 13.
[965] Ibid.
[966] Ibid.

suggested that Germany continue to occupy important territories like the Dąbrowa coal basin after the war, essentially holding them hostage until Warsaw had concluded the desired treaties with Berlin and otherwise proven its willingness to comply.[967] Even multinationalists in the GGW therefore searched for new mechanisms to ensure the fidelity of a population and political elite they no longer fundamentally trusted.

Still, the GGW's belief that it had secured the basis for a cooperative Polish government reassured Berlin. On 29 March Lewald again clarified that military and political union with an otherwise autonomous Polish state remained the foundational objective of the *Reichsleitung*'s imperial policy in Poland.[968] While the Chancellery and RAI were willing to discuss "particular border-corrections" in line with the recommendations of the GGW, Lewald made it abundantly clear that Berlin was not interested in annexing a large "border-strip".[969]

The GGW achieved another qualified success on 9 April 1918 by overseeing voting for the 55 elected members of the new Polish State Council. The PPS abstained from the elections, citing the indirect franchise.[970] Although the elections returned primarily National Democratic candidates averse to collaboration with the German Empire, the Regency nominated enough sympathetic candidates to reassure the GGW that the State Council would be pliable to Berlin's wishes.[971] At the same time, news of the startling early gains of Germany's Spring Offensives had resigned many Polish observers to the inevitability of German suzerainty. Working with Berlin increasingly seemed like the only pragmatic way to obtain a better deal for Poland.[972]

The prospect of German victory in the spring also renewed discussion among publicists and intellectuals over how Germany should secure its strategic interests in the Kingdom of Poland. The tone of public debate was pessimistic. Months of setbacks and apparent hostility from Polish national elites had severely deteriorated the credibility of multinational imperialism. Few intellectuals were willing to trust, in the same way that they had before 1916, that a Polish state would be a reliable and valuable component of the German Empire. Even those who continued to support a multinationalist strategy, often did so with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. In April 1918 Paul Rohrbach argued that Germany would need to continue to develop an autonomous Polish state.[973] He hoped that the leadership of Poland would work productively with the German Empire, but he acknowledged they might refuse multinational cooperation.

> It is possible that the Poles will show themselves to truly incapable of grasping their own place in Europe, and then there remains nothing left than to pass over them.[974]

Rohrbach's meaning was clear: Poles might well refuse to recognize German leadership, in which case Germany would need to be prepared to otherwise secure its position in Eastern Europe. This was a tepid endorsement coming from one of the most energetic and influential early supporters of multinational imperialism. Wilhelm von Massow would also promote a multinationalist strategy until the end of the war. But Massow also sympathized with the growing antipathy among Germans for what they now clearly regarded as the "muddled affair" in Poland, the political "swamp" which seemed to have trapped the German Empire.[975] Certainly he believed that so long as Poles demonstrated an "irreconcilable" or "hostile" attitude toward the German Empire, they could not reasonably expect Berlin to "accommodate" them.[976] Still, he

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[967] Ibid.
[968] Theodor Lewald, "Memorandum on Treaty Relationship with The Kingdom of Poland, 29 March 1918," March 29, 1918, 133–34, R43/5124, BArch.
[969] Ibid., 134.
[970] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 204.
[971] Ibid.
[972] Ibid., 200.
[973] Paul Rohrbach, "Machtfriede oder Friedensideal im Osten," *Deutsche Politik* 3 (April 19, 1918): 485.
[974] Ibid.
[975] Wilhelm von Massow, "Zur Lösung der Polenfrage," *Deutsche Politik* 3 (August 23, 1918): 1064.
[976] Ibid., 1068.

asked Berlin to at least refrain from antagonizing Warsaw by demanding unreasonable annexations. Germany, he argued, could still produce a stable multinational union with an autonomous Polish state, though he admitted that this now might require the forceful application of economic influence. Massow too believed that Germany could mandate Warsaw's obedience by leveraging access to the port of Danzig, the economic "key to their house".[977] Poland, he assured his readers, would eventually renounce its claims to Prussia and seek "political union with the Central Powers" in part because it would have no other choice.[978]

Other former proponents of multinational union concluded that events had proved them wrong, and that Poles would never accept German suzerainty. Hans Delbrück hoped that the emerging Bolshevist threat would convince Poles to seek an alliance with Germany.[979] However, by 1918 he had concluded that the Polish nation was "too self-aware", too proud, and too historic of a nation to accept a form of "restricted autonomy" under German leadership.[980] Attempting to impose German suzerainty over Poland could only provoke lasting resistance or conspiracy. Instead, Delbrück either Polish independence or an Austro-Polish solution. Delbrück wanted to make Poland Vienna's problem, and he hoped that Austro-trialism would trap Poland in the fractured, politically dysfunctional, and militarily impotent Austro-Hungarian Empire.[981]

Other German thinkers concluded that Polish statehood was now inevitable, but argued that imperial policy should now concentrate on isolating and neutralizing the Poland, rather than establishing German suzerainty. Richard Schmidt had maintained an ambiguous position towards Polish policy throughout the war. In 1915 he had endorsed federalism as an advantageous model of imperial organization, suggesting that he was thinking along the lines of multinationalist autonomy.[982] However, when separate peace with Russia had appeared likely, he had signed the Seeberg Memorandum, which had called for the annexation and colonization of a border-strip in Poland.[983] Thereafter he had been silent on Polish policy for a time. Now in the spring of 1918, Richard Schmidt clarified his thinking. Schmidt denounced Germany's decision to establish a Polish state, and believed that German efforts to win Poland's military support against Russia had "failed very quickly" largely because of Polish intransigence.[984] Poland's national leaders, he argued, had done nothing to earn German trust or repay the immense debt owed to the German Empire for building the Kingdom of Poland.[985] Schmidt recounted the full litany of German grievances against Poland: their failure to organize an army and "attach this army to German war leadership", the Oath Crisis, constant protests, and the resignation of the Kucharzewski government.[986] All, he argued, indicated that Polish nationalists were unwilling to follow German leadership, regardless of German concessions. Even if the GGW had managed to recruit some sympathetic elites, Schmidt argued that these had never exercised "authoritative" influence among the population, and had never been able to compete with more "popular anti-German currents".[987] He could only conclude that German imperial policy in Poland was "bankrupt".[988]

Recognizing the Polish state as an inevitable threat to German interests, Schmidt called on Berlin to cease efforts to influence Warsaw and instead pursue its diplomatic isolation and military neutralization.[989] He suggested manipulating Poland's constitution and international

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[977] Ibid., 1070.
[978] Ibid., 1068.
[979] Hans Delbrück, "Der definitive mit Friede mit Rußland und unser Verhältnis zu den Randvölkern," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, March 23, 1918, 59, 64.
[980] Hans Delbrück, "Die Aufgaben Deutschlands im Osten und Westen – Mitteleuropa – Staatsekretär v. Kühlmann," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, June 29, 1918, 113.
[981] Ibid., 114–15.
[982] Richard Schmidt, "Die Aufgaben der politischen Wissenschaft im Zeichen des Krieges," *Zeitschrift für Politik* 8 (1916): 1.
[983] Chancellery, "Memorandum on War Aims," September 1914, 201, R43/2476, BArch.
[984] Richard Schmidt, "Die neuen Richtpunkte für die Organisation Polens," *Zeitschrift für Politik*, March 1918, 252.
[985] Ibid., 268.
[986] Ibid., 272.
[987] Ibid., 275–76.
[988] Ibid., 273.
[989] Ibid., 277.

position to prevent the "concentration of military power" in the Kingdom of Poland.[990] Complete independence, Schmidt believed, would leave Warsaw in such a strategically precarious position in Eastern Europe, that it would not be able to threaten its neighbors.[991] To ensure this isolation, he encouraged Berlin to establish a series of unfriendly states on Poland's borders.[992] Finally, he demanded a renewed commitment to Germanizing the Prussian *Ostmark*.[993]

Georg Cleinow now spat venom at the idea of multinational imperialism, accusing supporters like Matthias Erzberger of treasonously endangering the empire for their own narrow confessional purposes.[994] He inveighed against what he considered Berlin's reckless commitment to the creation of a German-Polish union.[995] Cleinow insisted that the Kingdom of Poland would invariably pursue objectives hostile to the interests of the German Empire. He no longer believed that German officials could meaningfully impact Polish national sentiment by allying with influential Polish elites. Polish leaders sympathetic to German leadership, he noted, lacked influence. Polish leaders who wielded popular influence, by contrast, were antagonistic to Berlin. The conciliatory gestures of the GGW had failed to sway the political circles that actually could shape Polish nationalist discourse. The "carriers of the Greater-Polish idea", Cleinow argued, those "educated" and "half-educated" urban intellectuals and publicists who actually wrote, interpreted, and propagated the narratives of Polish nationhood, either wanted to exclude foreign competition from the local markets, or dreamed of building an independent Polish state where they themselves would rule.[996] Moreover, far from using the Roman Catholic Episcopate to influence Polish national sentiment, Cleinow complained that the GGW had proven incapable of controling Poland's lower-clergy. Cleinow believed that the lower Roman Catholic clergy were committed to an anti-German strain of Polish nationalism, and that they substantially reinforced anti-German sentiment in their communities.[997] He doubted if the Polish episcopate or even Rome itself would be able to purge this nationalist corruption.[998]

Cleinow also increasingly believed that antagonistic nationalist ideologies permeated the Polish masses, and that political elites were directed by this popular anti-German impulse far more than they actually influenced it. The reigning political ideologies of the masses, whether national democratic or Polish socialist, appeared inveterately hostile to German leadership.[999] Even if they GGW had managed to find sympathetic and influential Polish elites, which he believed they hadn't, Cleinow perceived Polish nationalist discourse as immovably anti-German and deeply entrenched throughout the Polish population. Indeed, Cleinow came to think of Polish nationalism as exhibiting a uniquely strong demotic solidarity which managed to unite a broad rural peasantry and a highly patriotic intelligentsia.[1000] In contrast to elsewhere in Europe, he believed socialism had not divided the Polish national community because Polish socialists had managed to frame the oppressed worker as a victim of foreign, rather than domestic, exploitation. Cleinow feared that the confluence of national and socialist grievances had forged a broad and unshakeable national solidarity in Poland, one which was resolutely opposed to accepting foreign leadership.[1001] He saw this popular anti-Germanism, backed by a mixture of nationalist and socialist rhetoric, manifested in both the PPS and Endecja.[1002]

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[990] Ibid., 278.
[991] Ibid., 278–80.
[992] Ibid., 288.
[993] Ibid., 293.
[994] Cleinow, "Vom polnischen Bauplatz," 388; Georg Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung: Ein Vortrage gehalten im Unabhängigen Ausschuß für einen Deutschen Frieden am 2. Mai 1918," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 19 (May 6, 1918): 147.
[995] Georg Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 5 (January 28, 1918): 133–34.
[996] Georg Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage als Problem der Reichspolitik," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 16 (April 15, 1918): 60.
[997] Georg Cleinow, "Nach dem ersten Friedensschluß der Weltkriegs," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 8 (February 18, 1918): 228.
[998] Ibid.
[999] Ibid.
[1000] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 142.
[1001] Ibid.
[1002] Ibid.

Cleinow concluded that Polish hostility towards the German Empire was inevitable. "Nothing will ever be able to satisfy the Poles".[1003] No autonomy, however generous, would convince them to work with Berlin for their mutual security. No concessions could distract the nation from its single-minded pursuit of "unification of all regions ethnographically belonging to Polandom".[1004] Beyond romantic irredentism, Cleinow noted that concrete strategic reasons would compel Warsaw to seize the Prussian *Ostmark.* The Polish government would soon realize that their economy required the developed cities and educated populations of these regions. Seizing Posen, West Prussia, and parts of Silesia would inaugurate a new program of economic and domestic renewal.[1005] Finally, Cleinow argued that the weight of tradition pressed Polish society into confrontation with Germany. Redeeming the Prussian partitions had been the goal of generations of Polish revolutionaries, poets, and intellectuals who had all deeply influenced Polish literary and political culture.[1006] How could Berlin hope to realistically overcome this built up animosity in the near future?

The experiences of the German occupation of Congress Poland, Cleinow argued, had made Poland's hostility to the German Empire unambiguous. The Polish state, once declared, had never joined the war against Russia, and had therefore refused to fulfill even the minimal "prerequisite" to earn Berlin's trust.[1007] Instead, Cleinow accused Polish politicians and agitators of negotiating with the Entente to secure their own territorial claims in Prussia after the war.[1008] Even apparently cooperative Polish elites planned to eventually conspire with the Germany's international rivals to seize Prussian territory.[1009] Collaborators like Lempicki, he argued, only tepidly supported *Ausgleich* with Germany in order to buy time for nationalist agitators to further infiltrate the *Ostmark*. Poles, Cleinow concluded, had unequivocally rejected the prospect of a German-Polish union.[1010]

Cleinow believed that a Polish state represented an urgent threat to the German Empire, and therefore argued that Poland could not be afforded complete independence under any circumstances. A sovereign Polish state risked becoming a "second Serbia on our border". A base of support and bolt-hole for nationalist agitators, it would constantly fund, provoke, supply, and otherwise support the subversion of German rule in the *Ostmark*.[1011] Indeed, he argued that the very existence of a Polish state reinforced nationalist sentiment in Prussia, offering an alternative vision of statehood which would compete with German "*Reichsgedanke*".[1012] If Prussia failed to secure German authority in the *Ostmark*, he warned, Polish nationalists, emboldened and reinforced by Warsaw, would strike with "full force" after the war.[1013] Even if the Polish state did not overtly support such agitation with its own military action, insurgency in the *Ostmark* would risk drawing in foreign intervention on Poland's behalf.[1014]

Across Eastern Europe, Cleinow concluded, German policies of imperial management must prioritize "breaking" or "withering" Polish national "resistance". Rather than bargain with Polish nationalists, Berlin must launch a "struggle against the idea of the greater-Polish state" .[1015] He implied that Ober Ost should undertake a campaign of ethnic cleansing to expel such "greater-polish" influence from the Baltics, and thereby finally secure the region for the German imperium.[1016] Just to be safe, Cleinow further suggested driving a human "wedge" between Poland

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[1003] Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," 136.
[1004] Ibid.
[1005] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 139.
[1006] Georg Cleinow, "Die Polenpolitik der Deutschen und Polen," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 9 (February 25, 1918): 233.
[1007] Ibid., 234–36.
[1008] Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," 134.
[1009] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 146.
[1010] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage als Problem der Reichspolitik," 61.
[1011] Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," 138.
[1012] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage als Problem der Reichspolitik," 60.
[1013] Cleinow, "Die Polenpolitik der Deutschen und Polen," 238.
[1014] Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," 137.
[1015] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage als Problem der Reichspolitik," 60.
[1016] Georg Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 11 (March 11, 1918): 290.

and Lithuania to permanently quarantine the latter region from Polish machinations.[1017] Cleinow also begged the *Reichsleitung* and OHL not to repeat in the Baltics the same mistakes they had made in Poland. That is, he advised them to avoid calling an autonomous state into existence before they were absolutely sure about its future loyalties.[1018]

Finally, Cleinow repeated his demands for the annexation and ethnic cleansing of additional Polish territory as the only effective means of securing the German Empire's eastern border from the Kingdom of Poland.[1019] In addition to annexations in the north, Cleinow recommended seizing territories all along the western border of Poland, including the western parts of the Warsaw, Kalisz, and Piotrków governorates.[1020] To stabilize control of these regions Cleinow wanted to withhold Reichstag or *Landtag* representation from any newly annexed territories for a period of at least 45 years.[1021] This was only the beginning.

> No, I can discover nothing of immorality in the suggestion, to want to prepare a broad settlement-strip between the Prussian and Russian Poles, through the expulsion of the Polish population for the German migrants returning from Russia.[1022]

Rather, he argued that it would be "weakness bordering on immorality" if Germany were to "renounce" this valuable tool which might "prevent the outbreak of a new continental war on our Eastern border".[1023] Germany must "drive our enemies away from the attack positions before of our fortress".[1024] Berlin, he argued, must replace the "completely unreliable" Polish population with more "secure" German residents.[1025]

By March 1918, Cleinow had further concluded that a strategy of encirclement similar to earlier proposals by Dietrich Schäfer would be necessary to neutralize the threat posed by a Polish state. He therefore endorsed a second line of annexation hooking down from Allenstein along Poland's eastern border, both to surround the country on three sides, and to cut off its potential military coordination with Russia.[1026] To the east of a "completely independent" Polish state, he called upon Berlin to form a new province of "South Prussia" by annexing most of Grodno and combining it with seizures in Łomża and Płock. The Bug and Vistula rivers would form the southern border of this massive province.[1027]

Cleinow allowed that the remaining rump Kingdom of Poland might be formally incorporated as a "protectorate" of the German Empire, but he no longer saw the Polish state as a positive asset for imperial security. Rather, Cleinow wanted Berlin to use its suzerainty to further cripple Polish military power.[1028] He suggested designing the German-Polish economic relationship to deliberately de-industrialize the Kingdom of Poland, and instead encourage its production of agricultural commodities.[1029]

Before November 1916, Georg Cleinow had publically and officially supported creating a large, powerful, and economically advanced autonomous Polish state in military and political union with the German Empire. By the summer of 1918, he so feared that Poles would use the

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[1017] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 151. Notably, Cleinow thought this "wedge" should be composed of Eastern European Jews settled onto territory annexed by the German Empire. He believed Jewish refugees would loyally serve a German state, which offered them protection from the expressive anti-Semitism evident elsewhere in the former Russian Empire.
[1018] Georg Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten II," *Die Grenzboten*, no. 12 (March 18, 1918): 315.
[1019] Cleinow, "Friedensreden, ein diplomatisches Terzett," 137; Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten," 291.
[1020] Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten," 293.
[1021] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 151.
[1022] Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten," 290.
[1023] Ibid.
[1024] Ibid.
[1025] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 151.
[1026] Ibid., 150.
[1027] Cleinow, "Der Aufbau im Osten," 293.
[1028] Cleinow, "Die Polenfrage vor der Entscheidung," 150.
[1029] Ibid.

resources afforded by a state to betray and dismember the German Empire, that he demanded Germany preemptively cripple the Kingdom of Poland, militarily encircle it, and purge the whole of Northeastern Europe of Polish nationals in order to ensure that Warsaw could not challenge German hegemony. Cleinow's transformation was dramatic, but indicative of a larger trend. Public supporters of multinational imperialism in Poland were beleaguered and wavering, beset by criticism and unsure if they really still believed that a Polish state would be trustworthy.

The German government's own commitment to a German-Polish union was again tested late in the spring of 1918. The Bolshevik revolution and collapse of order in Russia had left a number of Polish-speaking units of the former Tsarist army stranded without any particular government to command them. The units had loosely associated among themselves and some began trickling westward towards the Kingdom of Poland.[1030] This naturally interested German authorities. In February 1918, General Hoffmann had contacted General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, the commander of one such group, to negotiate the conditions of their return to the Kingdom of Poland. The OHL had also asked the Regency Council what, if any, relationship the Polish government desired with Dowbor-Muśnicki's troops.[1031] However, Dowbor-Muśnicki quietly circumvented German intermediaries and independently contacted the Regency Council, offering the services of the soldiers to Warsaw directly.[1032] The Polish government attempted to unilaterally accept this offer on 6 March, asking Dowbor-Muśnicki's men to swear a service oath to the Kingdom of Poland and signaling their intention to integrate his units as the "First Polish Corps" under their own command.[1033]

German intelligence discovered these independent negotiations on 12 March 1918 through the German consulate in Bern.[1034] By now, German policy-makers were loath to permit Warsaw to control such a large and well-equipped army. While the government remained committed to building a German-Polish union, few actually trusted Warsaw at the moment, and even fewer wanted the Kingdom of Poland to possess any real military strength until the German Empire had firmly established its suzerainty over the state. To the extent that German policy-makers still wanted to build a strong Polish army in the future, they wanted to proceed cautiously, and attempt to shape the ethos of the officer corps to value the multinational union with Germany. Presently, German imperial officials worried that Warsaw would use any military strength to resist German authority. Indeed, German intelligence reports described Dowbor-Muśnicki's army as suffused with "national democratic tendencies", and connected with the Entente.[1035] Letters intercepted by the War Ministry from Polish soldiers fighting in Russia only seemed to confirm that Polish nationalists viewed the "Polish Army of General Dowbor-Muśnicki" as the "last lifeline" for Poland and its final hope for realizing an independent Poland, including the territories of Posen and Galicia.[1036] German observers suspected that the army intended to disrupt Germany's control in occupied-Poland and sabotage the broader war effort. At roughly the same time, German officials discovered that the Regency Council was also negotiating with General Aleksander Osiński in Kiev. Beseler reacted forcefully, shutting off contact between the Regency Council and Dowbor-Muśnicki and eventually disbanding the "First Polish Corps" in May 1918.[1037] Some of the men in question defected to Józef Haller's nomadic army, but this was smashed at the battle of Kaniów on 11 May 1918.

Though defeated, the Regency Council's scheme to secure independent military strength only confirmed many German leaders' suspicions that the Polish government could not be trusted to accept German suzerainty, and that it's pliable façade covered disloyal schemes. On

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[1030] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 220.
[1031] OHL, "Report to the Foreign Office, 9 February 1918," February 9, 1918, 218, R1501/119831, BArch.
[1032] German Consulate in Bern, "Polish Pressebureau Report, Bern 12 March 1918," March 12, 1918, 8, R1501/119794, BArch.
[1033] Ibid.; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 220; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 206.
[1034] German Consulate in Bern, "Polish Pressebureau Report, Bern 12 March 1918," 8.
[1035] Romberg, "Report to Chancellor Hertling, 18 April 1918," April 18, 1918, 246, R1501/119831, BArch.
[1036] Wrisberg, "Report to the Chancellery on Intercepted Correspondence by Polish Soldier in the Russian Army, 23 April 1918," April 23, 1918, 90, R1501/119794, BArch.
[1037] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 222.

discovering Warsaw's negotiations with Osiński, Beseler dashed off a threatening letter to the Regency Council. Written 3 May, the letter informed the Regency council that this "abuse" of their authority had severely wounded the German-Polish "relationship of trust" and had even endangered their previously "acknowledged right of political participation in matters of the army".[1038] The Governor General chastised the councilors, blaming them for any casualties resulting from combat between German and Polish forces promulgated by their independent negotiations.[1039] When, contrary to Beseler's warnings, the Regency Council continued to negotiate independently with Polish units in Ukraine, Beseler followed through on his threat, and excluded the Council from its advisory role in subsequent decisions over the Polish army.[1040]

Proponents of nationalizing imperialism in Germany quickly latched onto the fiasco as proof of Polish treachery, and petitioned the German government to abandon multinationalist policy. In May 1918, Dietrich Schäfer offered a memorandum on behalf of the "Independent Committee for a German Peace", citing Warsaw's "aspirations for armaments" as evidence of Poland's intention to betray the German Empire.[1041]

> After authorities there persistently refused, indeed suppressed, any participation in the struggle against Russia, their current efforts to establish their own army with the help of General Dowbor-Muśnicki's units assembled around Bobruisk should not only not be promoted, but rather hindered to the extent possible. Polish flags will not flutter in the fields for us in the foreseeable future; a German Government, that assumes otherwise, sins against the Fatherland.[1042]

Nationalizing imperialists therefore cited the military negotiations as proof of their long-standing warnings that a Polish state could not be trusted, only contained.

Although the Regency Council's independent negotiations certainly further eroded German trust, the OHL, GGW, and *Reichsleitung* continued to pursue the creation of a German-Polish union. On 29 April 1918, the Polish Government sent a note to the Central Powers, indicating their readiness to begin negotiations on the final status of the Kingdom of Poland, and signaling their receptivity to a "military convention" and integration into Central European agreements.[1043] The note again requested the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Poland, and the renunciation of German annexations in Suwałki and the return of Chełm.[1044] These conditions were by now non-starters, but the note was an encouraging signal to Berlin. During an 8 May conference in the Chancellery, Hertling noted that he expected that a "declaration will shortly come out of the Polish Regency Council, according to which the Poles henceforth wish for a union with Germany".[1045] Subsequent discussions in Berlin regarding potential military and economic agreements with Austria-Hungary confirm that the leading civilian agencies of the German Empire, including the Foreign Office, were in agreement on the basic outlines of German imperial policy in Poland: Polish and German economies would be integrated, a

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[1038] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Report on Regency Council Negotiations with General Osinski, 3 May 1918," May 3, 1918, 254, R1501/119831, BArch.
[1039] Ibid., 255.
[1040] GGW, "Excerpts from the Underground Press in Poland, 1 June 1918," June 1, 1918, 266, R1501/119831, BArch.
[1041] Unabhängige Ausschuss für einen Deutschen Frieden and Dietrich Schäfer, "Denkschrift über Deutsche Ostpolitik," May 31, 1918, 3, R703/107, BArch.
[1042] Ibid.
[1043] Regentschaftsrat, "Bote der Königlich Polnischen Regierung an die Regierungen der Zentralmächte," April 29, 1918, 57, R703/12, BArch.
[1044] Ibid. Geiss exaggerated the importance of this note, suggesting that in failing to accept the Regency Council's conditions, it had effectively abandoned its efforts to build a Polish protectorate specifically in favor of annexations. Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 39. The 29 April note was an offer to begin negotiations, not a concession of hegemony, and it did not yet specify the exclusive military and political union with Germany that imperial policy-makers demanded. The Chancellery later responded to the Polish note, regretting that any military-convention must await the final agreement between Germany and Austria-Hungary over the future status of Poland. von der Bussche, "Response to Graf Lerchenfeld, 20 June 1918," June 20, 1918, 177, R1501/119794, BArch.
[1045] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Chancellery on Negotiations with Austria Hungary, 18 May 1918," May 8, 1918, 135, R43/2477, BArch.

German-Polish political and military union would obtain, and it would precede any larger Central European confederation.[1046] During summer negotiations with the Austro-Hungarian government, therefore, Berlin held to its demands for suzerainty over the Kingdom of Poland, and refused to reopen consideration of the Austro-Polish solution.[1047] In a June meeting with Burián, Hertling remained firm that German policy would aim for the "conclusion of a military convention with Poland" to ensure the "military security of our eastern border".[1048]

In part because of their resolve to construct a German-Polish union, the *Reichsleitung* and GGW also continued to resist the most radical proposals to nationalize a border-strip. On 11 May, Lewald mocked the very supposition that Germany could build a cordon sanitaire against Polish political activity. It could, he believed, only succeed in permanently alienating Polish national opinion.[1049] Though he also distrusted Polish motives, Lewald suggested the less permanent "Glasenapp-ish [*Glasenapp'schen*]" policy of establishing a German-Polish union, but continuing to occupy valuable territories and waiting to organize a capable Polish army until a probationary period had demonstrated Warsaw's fidelity.[1050]

In occupied-Poland, as the structures of a Polish state and government solidified, Warsaw and the GGW began to negotiate the details of the German-Polish relationship. The GGW did not expect that Warsaw would now resist military and political union with the German Empire. Radziwiłł, now as head of the Polish Political Department, focused narrowly on securing the territorial integrity of Congress Poland, and claiming possession of some additional territory west of the Bug.[1051] On 23 June, the Polish State Council also convened for the first time.[1052] After observing a session of the State Council on 26 June, GGW leaders were cautiously optimistic that their efforts to manipulate Polish national politics were finally yielding results. Activist representatives had emphasized the need to build a Polish state in "alliance with the Central Powers".[1053] Władysław Studnicki had even delivered an outspoken speech in which he crafted federalist narrative to endorse direct military and political union with the German Empire to confront the ongoing threat of Russian imperialism.[1054] Lerchenfeld reported that Studnicki had spoken with effect.[1055] As the State Council discussed sensitive issues, like the future borders of the kingdom, delegates would sometimes expressed lingering sympathies for an Austro-Polish solution and GGW officials pondered censorsing the proceedings.[1056] The ultimately refrained, decided that this move would be illegal and provocative. Beseler was altogether satisfied with the Stat Council, and believed that opposition to German leadership in the assembly would decay over time.[1057]

Indeed, the State Council appeared to pragmatically accept the basic parameters for the Kingdom of Poland indicated by the GGW. When Polish residents of Suwałki presented a petition to the State Council, requesting the annexation of the region to the Kingdom of Poland, Lerchenfeld happily reported that the activist parties had faithfully followed the Regency

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[1046] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference in Chancellery on Negotiations with Austria Hungary, 10 May 1918," May 10, 1918, 140–46, R43/2477, BArch.
[1047] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 212.
[1048] Chancellery, "Summary of Meeting Between Graf Burián and Chancellor Hertling, 11 June 1918," June 11, 1918, 167, R43/2477, BArch. Hertling confirmed this the following day, and noted that the OHL supported this plan. Chancellery, "Minutes of Meeting Between Graf Burián and Chancellor Hertling, 12 June 1918," June 12, 1918, 173, R43/2477, BArch.
[1049] Theodor Lewald, "Letter to Minister Drews, 11 May 1918," May 11, 1918, 16, R1501/119676, BArch.
[1050] Ibid., 17.
[1051] Oettingen, "Report to the Foreign Office, 31 July 1918," July 31, 1918, 27–28, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1052] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 204.
[1053] Press Department of the GGW, "Report on the Polish Press, 28 June 1918," June 28, 1918, 8, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1054] Ibid.
[1055] Hugo v.u.z. Lerchenfeld-Köfering, "Report to the Foreign Office, 26 June 1918," June 26, 1918, 13, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1056] Oettingen, "Report to the Foreign Office, 31 July 1918," 27–29.
[1057] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 205.

Council's lead in refusing to touch the "hopeless" matter.[1058] Even Passivist parties declined to take up the cause.[1059] State Council officials, did refuse to relinquish claims the Chełm, and their pressure led Radziwiłł to promise that he would attempt to renegotiate the issue with the Central powers.[1060] However, the assembly showed restraint in refusing to Dowbor-Muśnicki's offer to act as an advisor to the Polish army, and instead formally thanking General Barth for his ongoing dedication to training the Polish army.[1061] Overall Lerchenfeld reported to Beseler his belief that the "overwhelming majority of State Council members" valued the military strength of the German Army and that "close alliance with Germany seemed to them to be the only gurantee of an advantageous development of the Polish state".[1062]

The GGW's political successes in Warsaw were tempered by nationalist agitation elsewhere in occupied-Poland and even in Galicia over the summer of 1918. On 19 June, Glasenapp notified the Chief of Administration of a recent meeting of left-wing nationalists in Kraków whose results had been widely circulated throughout the GGW and GGL.[1063] The meeting had denounced the Regency Council as a "spineless tool" and enjoined Poles to abandon a "policy of reconciliation" and instead resist the occupation. They had called upon Poles to join the POW and fight for the redemption of "all Polish lands in an independent and democratic republic".[1064] At the same time, the central police administration for the GGW issued new warnings that the POW was organizing resistance.[1065] The central police suspected that recent political calm surely masked "more fervent" covert efforts by groups like the POW and PPS. The interrogation of several POW members appeared to confirm this.[1066] The report further claimed that soldiers from Dowbor-Muśnicki's disbanded corps, veterans already trained in the use of firearms and undoubtedly "hostile to Germany", had dispersed throughout the GGW in the past weeks and, according to unconfirmed reports, were already preparing for an "insurrection".[1067] Intelligence reports from the German consulate in Bern also warned of imminent rebellion in occupied-Poland, supported by the "restless" activity of the Entente.[1068]

As military reverse on the Western Front mounted in the summer of 1918, German paranoia sharpened. Some officials in the GGW regarded the occupied population as a hostile fifth column just waiting to attack. On 25 August, Nethe, already long suspicious of Polish motives, warned of widespread subversion and active preparation for armed resistance in the GGW.[1069] He described the PPS as popular, decentralized, and impervious to the influence of more sympathetic leaders.[1070] Though a "great part of their leadership has been interned in the mean time", this appeared to have little or no effect on the growth and organization of the movement.[1071] The associated POW, Nethe reported, "surely" possessed weapons, caches of which had been "occasionally" discovered.[1072] Nethe further suspected that the Entente was "extraordinarily active

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[1058] Kaiserlich Deutsches Kommissariat bei der königlich polnischen Staaatsregierung, "Bericht an das GGW, 30 Juli 1918," July 30, 1918, 32, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1059] Ibid.
[1060] Kaiserlich Deutsches Kommissariat bei der Königlich polnischen Staaatsregierung, "Bericht an das GGW, 10 August 1918," August 10, 1918, 69, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1061] Kaiserlich Deutsches Kommissariat bei der königlich polnischen Staaatsregierung, "Bericht an das GGW, 30 Juli 1918," 34.
[1062] Kaiserlich Deutsches Kommissariat bei der Königlich polnischen Staaatsregierung, "Bericht an das GGW, 10 August 1918," 74.
[1063] Monteglas, "Report from Consulate in Bern, 25 June 1918," June 25, 1918, 36, R1501/119717, BArch.
[1064] Ernst von Glasenapp, "Report on Polish Political Activity, 19 June 1918," June 19, 1918, 171–73, R1501/119794, BArch.
[1065] Hauptmann Oelze, "Bericht von der Zentralpolizeistelle des Generalgouvernements Warschau, 1 Juli 1918," July 1, 1918, 189, R1501/119794, BArch.
[1066] Ibid.
[1067] Ibid., 190.
[1068] Consulate in Bern, "Report to the Foreign Office, 6 August 1918," August 6, 1918, 49, R1501/119717, BArch.
[1069] Nethe, "Report to the Imperial Chancellor, 25 August 1918," August 25, 1918, 58, R1501/119717, BArch.
[1070] Ibid.
[1071] Ibid.
[1072] Ibid.

in Poland" and was coordinating closely with these covert preparations.[1073] Beseler's chief of staff was therefore convinced that Poles had already become what German imperialists had long feared: a fifth column that would rise up in collusion with Germany's rivals at any moment.

In July 1918, determined Entente resistance slowed, but did not halt the OHL's offensive operations on the Western Front. Still hoping to achieve military victory, the OHL, GGW, and *Reichsleitung* continued detailed planning for Germany's postwar reorganization of Polish space. The resulting plans should be regarded as Berlin's final agenda for Congress Poland produced under the assumption of a successful conclusion of the war effort. The plans make three things apparent. First, almost no military and civilian leaders trusted either Polish nationalism or the emerging Polish state. Most considered the threat of betrayal from Warsaw substantial enough to warrant extensive independent guarantees of German security. Second, despite these concerns, enough policy-makers believed there existed a sufficient chance that a multinational German-Polish union could stabilize and successfully bulwark German security in the long-run, that this remained the centerpiece of German imperial policy. Finally, while virtually all military and civilian leaders agreed on the necessity of policies to insulate the German Empire from Polish treachery, the GGW and *Reichsleitung* still effectively resisted the most radical proposals for annexation and nationalization pressed by the OHL.

A conference in Spa on 2-3 July 1918 confirmed the basic outlines for German imperial policy in Poland. The Kaiser, Chancellor, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, the War Minister, and representatives of the Foreign Office participated. The military and civilian leadership of the German Empire again reached a fundamental consensus in favor of a German-Polish military and political union as the basic framework for German aims in Congress Poland.[1074] This would still involve the provision of a substantial degree of political autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland, and participants even still believed that Warsaw should select its own (German) candidate for the Polish throne.[1075] Policy-makers further agreed on Germany's need for exclusive hegemony over Poland, and Chancellor Hertling even raised the possibility of issuing an "ultimatum" to Vienna to force Austria-Hungary's final divestment. He suggested the Foreign Office begin preparing the text for such an ultimatum ahead of time.[1076]

However, the multinationalist union presented at Spa was by now a qualified and hesitant version of the one conceived of by the *Reichsleitung* and GGW in the autumn of 1916. For one, German policy-makers no longer desired suzerainty over Poland as a means of integrating Polish military strength as a strategic asset of the German Empire. Once considered among the chief advantages of a multinational union, the potential contribution of the Polish army to the united military forces of a German-Polish union was not even mentioned in July 1918. German policy-makers had little faith that a Polish army would actually willingly fight to defend a German-Polish union. Ludendorff bluntly stated that "we do not attach any value to a military convention with Poland", as he did not expect Poland to follow its articles.[1077] As German leaders no longer seriously considered Poland as a reliable contributor to imperial security, the Kingdom of Poland's political position became considerably more precarious. German policy-makers increasingly described Poland as a "transit country [*Durchfuhrland*]", a neutral space through which armies and freight would move, rather than a permanent ally or (almost) federal state.[1078]

In light of doubts about the future loyalties of the Polish state, the participants of the Spa conference again concluded that imperial security necessitated substantial annexations of Polish territory adjacent to the Prussian border. Hertling opened the issue by emphasizing that he considered a "fourth partition of Poland" politically dubious, but still soliciting the opinion of the

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[1073] Ibid.
[1074] Chancellery, "Results of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," July 2, 1918, 183, R43/2477, BArch; Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," July 3, 1918, 196, R43/2477, BArch.
[1075] Chancellery, "Results of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," 181.
[1076] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," 195.R43/2477, 195.
[1077] Ibid., 196.
[1078] Chancellery, "Results of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," 183.

OHL.[1079] The OHL pressed for major border-adjustments, arguing that the necessity of military security outweighed the slim possibility of reconciliation with Polish nationalism to be gained by renouncing annexations. Ludendorff sneared that "Beseler hopes to make the Poles happy, and judges other than we do. In the border-question, he is also really not qualified".[1080] Hindenburg explained that he was currently drafting a memorandum specifying the OHL's vision for a revised German-Polish border. While he did not describe the new German frontier in detail, he made clear that this would entail substantial annexations in the North and the West of Congress Poland, including territory around Posen.[1081] Chancellor Hertling attempted to reign in these demands, mentioning that incorporating the densely-populated Vistula region around Płock might destabilize German domestic politics.[1082] Ludendorff reassured civilian leaders that the proposed border-line would follow parameters previously established by the *Reichsleitung*.[1083]

The OHL also recommended nationalizing policies of ethnic management to secure these new annexations. Hindenburg attempted to defer the issue, explaining that the "settlement-question" would be fully explored in the forthcoming memorandum.[1084] Ludendorff hinted, however, that the OHL would duly consider the civilian-leadership's concerns, and that proposed Germanization policies would focus mainly on colonization.[1085] The conference concluded with civilian and military leaders reaching tentative agreement that Germany would "claim" the "border-strip" specified in the forthcoming OHL memorandum and that colonization would be employed to Germanize the region.[1086]

However the OHL had misled the assembled *Reichsleitung*. When their promised memorandum arrived on 5 July, it substantially increased the scope of border annexations. The memorandum called for establishing a new defensive frontier along the Bobr-Narew-Bzura-Warta line, requiring the seizure of a truly massive swath of Congress Poland.[1087] The OHL further demanded that, for the security of the German Empire, only a reliable, German-speaking population could be permitted to reside in the region.[1088] Far beyond recommending gradual colonization, the OHL renewed their calls for expelling much of the Polish-speaking and Jewish population of this territory.[1089] They again suggested constructing new strategic railways and colossal military exercise grounds to justify the expropriation and expulsion of these 'unreliable' populations. They proposed military projects involving the clearance of roughly 8,000 square kilometers, nearly half of the surface-area claimed for annexation.[1090] To clear any legal obstacles to this radical effort of demographic reengineering, the memorandum finally recommended that a special military administration to govern the region for the foreseeable future.[1091]

The 5 July memo should not be interpreted as proof that the German Empire had essentially intended to annex and aggressively Germanize a border-strip of Polish territory throughout the war.[1092] First of all, the OHL self-consciously justified their turn towards a nationalizing model of imperialism by arguing that multinational imperialism had evidently

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[1079] Chancellery, "Minutes of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," 196.
[1080] Ibid., 197. This was an act of perfidious character assassination. Beseler had, in fact, previously been judged by many to be the most qualified candidate to replace Schlieffen as the Chief of the General staff. He had literally written the book on modern fortifications, and had smashed two of the more impressive forts during the first two years of the war. Beseler was certainly qualified to speak on matters of border defense.
[1081] Ibid., 196.
[1082] Ibid., 197.
[1083] Ibid., 196.
[1084] Ibid.
[1085] Ibid., 195.
[1086] Chancellery, "Results of Conference on the Polish Question at Spa, 2-3 July 1918," 184.
[1087] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 142.
[1088] Ibid.
[1089] Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 532.
[1090] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 142; Paul von Hindenburg, "Denkschrift Über Den Polnischen Grenzstreifen," July 5, 1918, 100, R1501/119824, BArch.
[1091] Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 142.
[1092] See especially Ibid. Geiss uses the 5 July memorandum to conclude that plans for the annexation and Germanization of a Polish border-strip constituted the core of German imperial policy throughout the war. If some resisted this agenda, Geiss believes they were easily overawed by nationalist and militarist pressure.

failed. The experience of occupying Congress Poland, they argued, had proven that Poles could not be trusted as loyal supporters and defenders of the German Empire. Since their "liberation", the memo argued, the Poles had done absolutely nothing, "which could offer to us some sort of guarantee for their loyal conduct in the future".[1093]

> On the contrary, the Poles failed completely, when we called upon them to support us with troops. When we founded a university for them, the students striked. When the peace with Ukraine showed a way out of the war for the first time, the Poles showered the German Empire with slander.[1094]

The OHL therefore premised their demands for annexation and Germanization on the conviction that Berlin could not reasonably trust an autonomous Polish state to secure its eastern flank. German suzerainty could offer no "secure protection" because Poland would "tolerate no such fetters on its independence in the long run".[1095] Experience had shown that Poland would inevitably betray the German Empire, and that the Polish nation "will remain hostile to us, so long as the greater-Polish dream is unfulfilled".[1096] They warned Berlin not to allow themselves to be fooled by the outwardly "loyal" behavior of the current government in Warsaw. The Regency Council and State Council, they argued, lacked any semblance of popular support, and existed only because of the GGW's backing.[1097] The OHL saw no prospect in this small cadre of sympathetic elites influencing Polish national sentiment. They believed that antipathy towards the German Empire was too broad, and deeply entrenched, to efface. As soon as occupation troops withdrew from an autonomous Kingdom of Poland, Ludendorff and Hindenburg firmly believed that the Polish nation would begin to pressure Warsaw to pursue nationalist claims in Prussia. The Polish monarchy would eventually bow to this pressure, or be overthrown.[1098] Germany therefore required direct control over new territories with politically reliable populations to ensure the "reliable fortification" of their border with Poland.[1099]

The OHL's skullduggery ignited a final confrontation within the imperial leadership over policy towards Poland. Major and important factions of the *Reichsleitung* and GGW strenuously opposed the OHL's maximalist border-strip, and its aggressive program of nationalizing ethnic management, fearing that these would sabotage a German-Polish union. However, even as imperial agencies resisted the OHL's border-strip, the vision of multinational imperialism they espoused looked quite different from the optimistic plans of 1916. Also concerned about the possibility of inter-ethnic reconciliation, and the potential loyalty of the Polish state, Civilian policy-makers countered the OHL's war aims by proposing alternative structures and mechanisms to dragoon the compliance of the Polish state.

The RAI led the civilian agencies in denouncing the OHL's aggressive program and defending a more disciplinary brand of multinational imperialism. On 31 July, Wallraf submitted an unflinching criticism of the Hindenburg memorandum. He demanded the convocation of a new conference of relevant imperial offices to override the OHL's proposals.[1100] In both his letter and an appended memorandum, the RAI detailed the its suspicions of a nationalist border-strip and expressed continued commitment to a German-Polish union.[1101] The RAI did not contest the "necessity" of a "border-strip on military grounds" which they admitted "cannot be disputed".[1102] The office instead objected that the size of the OHL's demands. Annexing these territories directly would involve the incorporation of a large and "overwhelmingly anti-German"

[1093] von Hindenburg, "Denkschrift Über Den Polnischen Grenzstreifen," 102.
[1094] Ibid.
[1095] Ibid., 97.
[1096] Ibid., 98.
[1097] Ibid., 102.
[1098] Ibid.
[1099] Ibid., 98.
[1100] Max Wallraf, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 31 July 1918," July 31, 1918, 109, R1501/119824, BArch.
[1101] Ibid.
[1102] Ibid.

population into the German Empire.[1103] But the RAI considered the OHL's proposals to nationalize this territory either ineffective or counterproductive. For one, the office argued that governing these regions under "military administration" would backfire. "An old cultural-country [*altes Kulturland*] like Poland" would never accept the insult of being ruled as an "African colonial possession".[1104] Similarly, the RAI rejected the OHL's proposals for "forced expropriation", even if they were dressed up as legal acquisitions for military purposes.[1105] Nobody, they argued, would be fooled by the legal justification, and the policy's obvious nationalizing intent would provoke an "insurmountable resistance" among the resident population.[1106] Moreover expropriations would not even succeed in building a "reliable German population", as they would not impact urban populations, where most of the nationalist clergy and Polish intelligentsia resided.[1107]

Wallraf and the RAI therefore expressed their continued support for a German-Polish union as the only plausible means for possibly achieving Germany's strategic aims in Eastern Europe. Despite the occupation's difficulties in enlisting enthusiastic Polish cooperation, the RAI maintained that multinational union was a desirable and achievable objective for Berlin.

> Were it to be achieved, there would be no more gap in the wreath of states, which would encamp before [*sich vorlagern*] Germany from the Baltic to the Black Sea as a defensive wall against the Russian danger. The war aim in the East would be completely achieved.[1108]

Even if the German Empire did not succeed in establishing Poland as a reliable protectorate, the RAI argued that it needed to make an attempt. The alternatives were much worse, they reminded their colleagues. An independent Poland, they argued, would become a prize over which Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia would fight for decades.[1109] Practically, this meant that Poland would eventually fall under the sovereignty or suzerainty of one of these powers in any case.[1110]

Observers in the RAI still believed that Polish elites might accept German suzerainty. They believed that the loss of Chełm at Brest-Litovsk had served as a "terrifying awakening" of Polish leaders from their greater-Polish fantasies, and that the Poles would accept Berlin's leadership as the imminent defeat of the Entente became more obvious.[1111] Conversely, fear of either Bolshevik or Russian imperial recovery would finally convince Polish national elites of the need for German military protection.[1112] Indeed, the RAI cited the support of the Regency Council and the Steczkowski government for military and political union as an encouraging sign of an emerging collaborationism.[1113] A border-strip on the model proposed by Hindenburg, the RAI concluded, would drive a stake through the heart of this pending strategic achievement. A larger and aggressively Germanized border-strip would scuttle the possibility of a German-Polish union just as surely as the cession of Chełm had sunk the Austro-Polish solution.[1114] No government, especially a Polish government, would be able to accept the border-strip proposed Hindenburg and still survive.[1115] No subsequent government or parliament would ever consider concluding the treaties necessary to establish German suzerainty.[1116] Germany would thereby sabotage its broader control over Poland for limited strategic gains.

[1103] RAI, "Zur Grenzstreifenfrage," July 31, 1918, 112, R1501/119824, BArch.
[1104] Ibid., 113.
[1105] Wallraf, "Letter to Chancellor Hertling, 31 July 1918," 110.
[1106] Ibid.
[1107] Ibid.
[1108] RAI, "Zur Grenzstreifenfrage," 114.
[1109] Ibid., 113.
[1110] Ibid.
[1111] Ibid., 114.
[1112] Ibid.
[1113] Ibid.
[1114] Ibid.
[1115] Ibid.
[1116] Ibid.

However, the model of multinationalism simultaneously proposed by the RAI included significant disciplinary safeguards to mandate Poland's loyalty and punish infidelity. The RAI still supported a mild eastward expansion of Poland, but no longer wanted Poland to have a direct border with Russia. Such a connection might facilitate Polish-Russian military cooperation.[1117] Importantly, the RAI also endorsed a far more coercive version of the proposed military convention between Germany and Poland. The new convention, drafted by the Prussian War Ministry in the spring of 1918, had circulated throughout the civilian and military leadership of the German Empire, meeting with broad approval.[1118] The War Ministry's convention would still establish German suzerainty over Poland. The German-Polish union would still be justified in federalist terms, as a structure to fortify the mutual security of the German Empire and the Kingdom of Poland, but the articles newly introduced in the War Ministry's 1918 draft convention departed markedly from both the traditions of German federalism and the 1916 model of multinational imperialism.[1119] While it would preserve Poland's nominal self-governance, the revised convention would also effectively empower the German army to establish a shadow border-strip of fortifications to secure the German Empire, or even a quasi-permanent occupation to dictate Polish loyalty from the barrel of a gun. Article 26 of the 1918 convention, for instance, would establish the legal right of the German Empire to maintain a provisional occupation of the Kingdom of Poland long after the war, to be demobilized only as Polish army units were trained to replace it.[1120] Though theoretically limited in duration, the ongoing occupation would give Berlin necessary time to shore up its political influence in the Polish army and Warsaw more broadly. More significantly, Article 16 empowered the German Empire to post "exclusively German garrisons", or composite German and Polish garrisons, in "Polish fortresses", even in peace-time.[1121] Regardless of their national composition, Article 16 specified that all fortress garrisons would be administered by a Polish civilian administration, but placed under the authority of a German Governor and Chief of Staff.[1122] In effect, even if the German army declined to garrison troops in Polish fortresses, a German command would surveil every fortress and thereby ensure that it remained faithful to Berlin. Just as importantly, Article 13 of the 1918 convention gave the Kaiser the exclusive right to decide where fortresses may be built, to order the construction of new fortresses, and even to schedule the demolition of old ones.[1123] Together, these two articles would give Berlin the legal authority to militarily police the Kingdom of Poland, to ensure its continuing loyalty, or to punish any treachery.[1124] The convention would permit the Kaiser to erect a new fortress, garrisoned with reliable German soldiers and commanded by a German governor and chief of staff, within artillery range of Polish government buildings in Warsaw.

Articles 16 and 13 introduced mechanisms of German authority far more coercive and pervasive than the German-Polish treaty relationships proposed in 1916. Proposals for a German-Polish union in 1916 had relied far more on negotiation and the perception of mutual self-interest to encourage Poland's long-term acceptance of German suzerainty. These measures also departed markedly from the precedents of German federalism. Article 64 of the imperial constitution had given the Kaiser the exclusive right to appoint commanders of fortresses. However, the Kaiser had been prohibited from unilaterally constructing new federal fortifications in Bavaria, which instead required special negotiations with the King. Moreover, article 8 had assured Bavaria a perpetual seat on the Bundesrat committee for the Army and Fortresses. No

[1117] Ibid., 115.
[1118] Kriegsministerium, "Vorläufige Entwurf einer Deutsch-Polnischen Militärkonvention," 1918, 305, R1501/119823, BArch. The memorandum also shows up in Undersecretary Lewald's files, Kriegsministerium, "Vorläufiger Entwurf einer Deutsch-Polnischen Militärkonvention (Lewalds Abschrift)," 1918, 60, N2176/59, BArch.
[1119] RAI, "Zur Grenzstreifenfrage," 115.
[1120] Kriegsministerium, "Vorläufige Entwurf einer Deutsch-Polnischen Militärkonvention," 307.
[1121] Ibid., 306.
[1122] Ibid.
[1123] Ibid., 305.
[1124] Ibid.

such courtesy would be extended to Poland. If the RAI and German civilian government were unwilling to commit to the radical methods of ethnic management necessary to secure large annexations in Congress Poland, their support for the War Ministry's revised military convention demonstrates that they had still developed an intense interest in dominating Poland through the threat of force.

Despite the widespread distrust of Warsaw, and consequent desire for more extensive instruments of German coercion in Poland, civilian agencies still l effectively resisted the most aggressive models of nationalizing imperialism demanded by the OHL. On 5 August, Ludendorff ordered Beseler to begin prepartions for "colonization" efforts in the border-strip, including requiring civilians to obtain authorization prior to purchasing new land.[1125] Ludendorff also insisted that the German Empire retain formal ownership of Russian state properties to "facilitate" German settlement and the expulsion of Poles from the border-strip.[1126] He issued these instructions without the sanction of the *Reichsleitung*. Beseler refused to submit to the order, and instead reported the Ludendorff's chicanery to the Chancellery. The Chancellery subsequently chastised the OHL for overstepping its responsibilities and attempting to independently shape imperial policy in Poland.[1127] The *Reichsleitung* could not tolerate the military leadership attempting to unilaterally dictate imperial policy, far less so because the implementation of these particular measures would constitute a "decisive break with the policy followed by the imperial authorities involved in Poland" and would bring Berlin into "sharp opposition to the Polish government".[1128]

Indeed, by 7 August, uproar over the OHL's 5 July memorandum had grown sufficiently intense that Vice Chancellor Payer called a new conference on Polish policy on 9 August in the Foreign Office.[1129] In the conference, the *Reichsleitung* again repudiated the OHL's proposals for ethnic cleansing to secure the border-strip. Participants in the conference broadly agreed that expulsions would either fail before the "tenacious resistance of the Poles", or would require an unthinkable degree of naked coercion and violence to achieve.[1130] With the exception of the President of the Prussian Settlement Commission, and Friedrich von Schwerin, every representative of the German government in attendance rejected expropriation as an "impossible" strategy.[1131]

Conclusion

By August 1918, therefore, German confidence in multinationalism as a strategy for stable imperial expansion had therefore deteriorated markedly from its apex in November 1916. Repeated political crises in occupied Poland convinced German officials, soldiers, intellectuals, and publicists that neither Poles nor their government in Warsaw could be trusted to cooperate with and defend a German-Polish union. Nationalizing imperialists claimed that events in Poland had, in fact, vindicated their warnings of the Polish nation's inherent hostility to Berlin. The imperial government's trust in the multinationalist paradigm of ethnic management reached its nadir in the wake of the Oath Crisis, which German policy-makers interpreted as an unequivocal renunciation of German leadership by Polish nationalists, and an indication that hostility towards the German Empire was more widespread than previously believed. Deeply shaken in their conviction that the German Empire could eventually mold the Kingdom of Poland into a reliable protectorate, military and civilian leaders began to seek an alternative solution to the Polish question, even briefly abandoning plans for German suzerainty in favor of partition with Austria-Hungary. Over the spring and early summer of 1918, the GGW's hold over occupied-Poland, its influence over the government in Warsaw, and the German Empire's hegemony in Eastern

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[1125] Erich Ludendorff, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 5 August 1918," August 5, 1918, 84, R43/5124, BArch.
[1126] Ibid.
[1127] Max Wallraf, "Note to the Paul von Hindenburg, 16 September 1918," September 16, 1918, 53, R43/5124, BArch.
[1128] Ibid.
[1129] Friedrich von Payer, "Note Circulated in the Chancellery, 7 August 1918," August 7, 1918, 73, R703/12, BArch.
[1130] Theodor Lewald, "Note on the 9 August Discussions over the Border-Strip," August 1918, 158, R1501/119824, BArch.
[1131] Ibid.

Europe all stabilized enough that German policy-makers once again considered the creation of a stable, reliable, and strategically advantageous German-Polish union plausible. They therefore tentatively resumed their efforts to construct an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty.

Nonetheless, the experiences of 1916 and 1917 produced lasting effects on German imperial policy. The failure of Polish recruitment, student strikes, the July mutiny, and conflicts with Polish leaders over the composition of the royal government all contributed to a mounting skepticism over the possibility of a durable German-Polish union, and convinced German policy-makers to adopt a more cautious and disciplinary imperial policy in Eastern Europe. By the summer of 1918, Berlin pursued a qualified multinationalist agenda in Poland, but few policy-makers did so with the optimism and confidence evident in 1916. Most were skeptical of Poland's future fidelity, and some considered efforts to build a German-Polish union reckless.

Policy-makers and occupation officials specifically lost faith in the ability of the German Empire to consistently and effectively influence Polish national sentiment through a cadre of sympathetic native elites. Germans increasingly felt they could not find any reliable and sympathetic Polish elites. Many suspected that wartime political collaborators had feigned compliance, but did little to actually assist Berlin and instead waited for their opportunity to betray the German Empire. Simultaneously, Germans began to doubt that small groups of notable could actually willfully redirect and shape public opinion and national narratives in a short period of time. Experiences in Poland in the later years of the war discredited this leadership oriented sociology of nationalism, and many Germans instead began to think of the political substance of national sentiment as more rooted in perceptions, culture, or perhaps even essence, of the demos.

In either case, the later years of the occupation saw Germans' growing equation of national identity with a set of relatively immutable, and generally anti-German, political attitudes. German observers increasingly concluded that Polish nationals could not be persuaded or manipulated to abandon claims to Prussian territory or to accept German leadership as legitimate. From the experiences of occupying Congress Poland German imperialists instead took the lesson that foreign nations would not accept autonomy under German suzerainty, and that they would always resist or even conspire to overthrow German leadership. The experiences of the wartime occupation of Poland, in other words, discredited multinational imperialism for many German policy-makers and much of the German public.

The German Army's support for multinational imperialism decayed significantly in the later years of the war. The OHL briefly abandoned its previous support for a German-Polish union in late 1917, and insisted that Germany should partition Congress Poland with Austria-Hungary. In 1918, the *Reichsleitung* succeeded in convincing the OHL to accept renewed efforts to construct a German-Polish union.[1132] However, Hindenburg and Ludendorff no longer regarded a multinational union as a positive reinforcement of Germany's military strength. At best, they considered suzerainty an unfortunate necessity for insulating the hostile Polish state from foreign influence. The OHL therefore prioritized concrete protections for the German Empire against the threat of Polish subversion or military action. Hindenburg and Ludendorff continued to press for the seizure of massive swathes of territory along the northern and western frontiers of Poland, and insisted that Germany could only maintain a secure hold over these territories through autocratic governance, aggressive Germanization, and even ethnic cleansing. Certainly some in the army disagreed with these goals. In contrast to the early war, however, no vocal advocates of multinationalism resisted the proponents of nationalizing imperialism. The influence of the OHL was tempered by the restraint of figures like Hoffmann, but was no longer counterbalanced by the positive support for a German-Polish union originally offered by Falkenhayn, the Deputy General Staff, or even Ludendorff and Hindenburg themselves.

While the OHL pushed for a radical agenda of annexations and Germanization in the final months of the war, it's influence on Polish imperial policy has been overstated. At no point did Hindenburg and Ludendorff actually lead other policy-makers on the issue. They did not

[1132] Chancellery, "Minutes of Meeting Between Graf Burián and Chancellor Hertling, 12 June 1918," 173.

dictate imperial policy in Poland, though they certainly tried. In late 1917, the OHL leaders split over whether to pursue an Austro-Polish solution, or continue with efforts to build a German-Polish union. By the time they reached agreement in favor of an Austro-Polish solution, civilian policy-makers had already begun to reconsider, and renew their support for multinational imperialism. When the OHL pushed for a model of nationalizing imperialism far more aggressive than civilians were willing to accept, their demands were met with stubborn and effective resistance in Berlin. The OHL advised Berlin on imperial policy, and their support or opposition carried weight, but their influence was insufficient to foist a particular strategy upon an unwilling Kaiser and *Reichsleitung*.

By 1918 even the leaders and functionaries of the GGW, once the self-assured engine of multinationalist imperial policy, wavered in their support for a German-Polish union. Local authorities across German occupied-Poland perceived a growing hostility from the surrounding population, and felt increasingly unable to manage or suppress anti-German nationalist sentiment. Georg Cleinow had renounced his previously vocal and articulate commitment to multinationalism, and now viciously attacked the policy and argued that Germany could only achieve security in the east through the vigorous application of military force and the aggressive Germanization of territories directly under Berlin's control. Wolfgang von Kries had similarly grown disillusioned with efforts to enlist Polish collaboration. In 1916, Kries had advised Beseler against annexing Polish territory in the north of Congress Poland, as even these claims could upset Polish national sentiment. By 1918, he encouraged Berlin to abandon efforts at reconciliation with Poland and instead secure itself from the Polish threat through extensive annexations in the north *and* west of Congress Poland. Beseler's military Chief of Staff, Nethe, suspecting Poland's eventual betrayal of the German Empire, likewise supported the Germanization or autocratic military governance of an extensive border-strip, often contrary to Beseler's official policy. Ernst von Glasenapp, the top police authority in the GGW, continued to tentatively support multinational union with Poland, but urged Berlin to hold valuable Polish territories hostage after the war, until Warsaw proved its loyalty. By the end of the war, Beseler and Lerchenfeld were the least ambivalent supporters of multinationalist policy. Even the Governor General, however, no longer trusted the Regency Council. Both conceded that more coercive and robust mechanisms of German control over Poland would be necessary to guarantee German security.

After wavering in 1917, the Monarchy, the Chancellery, the RAI, and the Foreign Office ultimately continued the effort to construct an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty. However, the civilian leadership of the German Empire did so with a much weaker consensus and degree of commitment than in 1916. Until the end of his tenure as State Secretary for the Foreign Office, Richard von Kühlmann, distrusted Poland and questioned the wisdom of multinationalist strategy. The RAI and Chancellery continued to support the creation of German-Polish union, but now called for either the application of "*Glasenapp'schen*" policies or the legal right to establish a permanent quasi-occupation, to ensure Berlin's absolute control over its future protectorate.

As a direct result of their growing distrust of Poland, German policy-maker's reshaped their entire imperial strategy in Eastern Europe. In Poland, they adjusted their original plans for a German-Polish union, introducing new measures and constitutional mechanisms to inflate Berlin's political influence in Warsaw or, failing that, to deter and punish treachery by the Kingdom of Poland. Indeed, by the end of the war, justifications for German suzerainty focused more often on containing the Kingdom of Poland and limiting its freedom of action than on integrating its strength as an asset of the German Empire. Berlin and the GGW agreed to slow efforts to build a Polish national army, focusing on training only a small officer corps and a few core units until they felt reasonably confident that the Polish army would not turn its weapons on Germany. Policy-makers began discussing chastising Polish defiance by cutting or taxing Polish international trade through the port of Danzig. German leaders also seized upon Glasenapp's idea of holding economically and strategically important regions of Poland hostage under a postwar occupation until Warsaw could demonstrate its fidelity. Finally, civilian and military leaders demanded the authority to deploy fortified military outposts throughout the Kingdom of Poland,

overseen by German governors and Chiefs of Staff, and potentially garrisoned exclusively by German soldiers.

Distrust of Poland's reliability also led military and civilian leaders to more seriously consider more extensive annexations of Polish territory to fortify the German border. The OHL pushed for truly vast annexations in the North and West of Poland. Civilian planners and the leadership of the GGW ultimately resisted the massive scale of Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's demands, but few contested the assertion that Germany needed to fortify its eastern frontier with the unpredictable Kingdom of Poland. Most now considered the annexation of at least some territory, especially around the industrial basin of Upper-Silesia, indispensible. This naturally revived the issue of how Germany would manage the population of these new provinces, and here too military and civilian policy-makers bent increasingly towards nationalizing paradigms of ethnic management. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, of course, gradually resurrected old schemes for purging territories of their Polish inhabitants and settling reliable ethnic Germans in their place. Germany's civilian leadership was more skeptical about colonization and ethnic cleansing, but they also carefully considered less radical alternatives, like placing annexations under special military administration and denying German citizenship to Polish-speakers. The ultimate restraint of German-policy makers on questions of ethnic management grew from four considerations: they considered proposals like expulsions unthinkable or liable to provoke international outrage, they worried about the practical feasibility of these policies, they believed aggressive Germanization would guarantee lasting and destabilizing Polish resistance, and, importantly, they understood that such efforts were sure to smash any remaining possibility of a German-Polish union. So long as multinational union seemed plausible, it represented a valuable opportunity-cost, and a barrier to nationalizing models of imperial management.

Debate among German officials over the scale of the Kingdom of Poland was much less contentious. With the erosion of German trust, dreams of building a vast Kingdom of Poland encompassing parts of Lithuania and much of White Ruthenia also crumbled. Those who continued to support the extension of Poland into White Ruthenia, increasingly suggested only minor border-corrections. Moreover, most came to agree with Hindenburg and Ludendorff that the Kingdom of Poland should not steward Germany's military frontier with Russia. Rather, 1917 and 1918 saw an emerging consensus in support of encircling the Kingdom of Poland with territory under Berlin's firm control. The threat of overwhelming military force would deter Polish treachery.

Growing doubts about Polish reliability also impacted German imperial policy in the Baltic region. In light of new demands for national autonomy pressed by Lithuanian political leaders, and the strictures of the July 1917 Reichstag peace resolution, replicating Germany's 1916 bargain with Poland in Lithuania would seem the natural course of action for imperial planners in Berlin. However, military and civilian leaders were no longer confident, in late 1917, that foreign nations would accept German leadership in foreign policy and wartime command in exchange for domestic autonomy. Rather than attempting to establish a German-Lithuanian union, therefore, military and civilian policy-makers prepared to build facile Baltic states deliberately stripped of any effective guarantees for their own autonomy. Unlike Poland, they would be guaranteed no autonomous armies. Personal union with the Hohenzollern line would ensure that new Baltic governments functioned as pliable instruments of German policy. Eventually, German planners hoped, these governments would also facilitate gradual Germanization and annexation of the region. If the leadership of Germany retained some hope for a multinational union with Poland by the end of the war, they now absolutely refused to employ such a risky strategy in the Baltics.

Finally, as German officials increasingly feared Poland as a potential rival for hegemony in Central Europe, they crafted new policies to inoculate the Baltics from Polish meddling. Installing the Kaiser as the sovereign was meant to ensure the exclusion of Polish nobles and elites from the ducal courts or governments in new states. German planners also began to consider implementing new policies of restricting Polish landownership in the Baltics, or even purging the area of its Polish-speaking population.

Throughout the war, therefore, German imperial policy was always rather explicitly

shaped by the assumption that Poland was a civilized and politically sophisticated nation. German imperial leaders were not, as some have suggested, motivated by the fear of diffusion of Polish barbarism westward to purge annexed territories or establish a quarantine zone against an imagined Slavic infection.[1133] Rather, policy-makers adopted more coercive and disciplinary measures of ethnic management because they recognized the Polish nation's capacity to build a potentially powerful state, but increasingly worried that Polish military power and diplomatic influence would threaten German interests, rather than support them. Assessments of Polish *Kulturfähigkeit* and *Staatsfähigkeit* in Berlin did not meaningfully change during the war, but their confidence in the potential fidelity of a Polish state did.

German Public opinion also swung decisively against multinational imperialism in the later years of the war. Unlike the policy-makers of the German government, the intellectuals and publicists of the German Empire did not notice the subtle improvement of Germany's position in Congress Poland in the spring of 1918. Confidence in the ability of Germany to form a stable and permanent confederation with Poland therefore never really recovered from the severe blows of the summer and autumn of 1917. Nationalizing imperialists seized upon these setbacks and deployed them to justify an agenda of annexation, Germanization, and ethnic cleansing regardless of any technical legal strictures. An article entitled "The Polish Danger", published in the *Leipziger Neuesten Nachreichten und Handels-Zeitung*, was exemplary.[1134] Therein the author argued that the Polish nation would remain irreconcilably hostile to the German Empire so long as Prussia controlled the *Ostmark*.[1135] He therefore cast multinational imperialists as traitors to the nation, either characters of "mixed-blood" and split loyalties, or "philosopher[s] of the style of Bethmann-Hollweg" who were foolish enough to believe that Polish "national sentiment" could be overcome by a civic "devotion to the state".[1136] If anything, he continued, the war had demonstrated that only nations with a firm national identity could hold together in the face of modern warfare. *Völkisch* identity could thrive where statist patriotism failed.[1137] The 1916 creation of the Polish state, he complained, had only equipped Poles with a political and military organization to more effectively confront the German Empire.[1138] Now worried by Germany's precarious position, the author called for the immediate state-sponsored expulsion of Poles from the Prussian *Ostmark* itself.[1139] The author predicted that Catholic traitors in the Reichstag would resist this action, but the author called upon the Kaiser to simply ignore questions of legality in this urgent "defensive struggle against the Poles".[1140] The article in question was sent to the Chancellor with a personal appeal to the Kaiser to embark upon this illegal adventure.[1141] The sender was a Saxon *Justizrat*.

The nationalizing imperialist camp gained strength towards the end of the war as fence-sitters and former multinationalists concluded that Germany could not reasonably rely on Polish collaboration. Previously uncommitted or ambivalent thinkers like Richard Schmidt began to vigorously criticize the multinationalist strategy in light of events in occupied-Poland. Georg Cleinow, of course, defected from his prior work with Beseler to become one of the most venomous and uncompromising public supporters of nationalization. Cleinow's *volte-face* is startling in degree, but represented a larger trend of multinationalist intellectuals abandoning their earlier support for a German-Polish union. Hans Delbrück had considered incorporating Poland as a federal state of the German Empire in the early years of the war.[1142] Yet by 1918, he

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[1133] Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 10–12, 25, 96.
[1134] Schnauß and Leipziger Neuesten Nachrichten und Handels-Zeitung, "Die polnische Gefahr," September 8, 1918, 3, R1501/119796, BArch.
[1135] Ibid.
[1136] Ibid.
[1137] Ibid.
[1138] Ibid.
[1139] Ibid.
[1140] Ibid.
[1141] Schnauß, "Letter to the Imperial Chancellor, 14 September 1918," September 14, 1918, 2, R1501/119796, BArch.
[1142] Hans Delbrück, "Die Rede des Reichskanzlers und die Zukunft Polens," *Preußische Jahrbücher*, August 1915, 129; Delbrück, "Die Welt-Friedens-Liga," 75.

feared that Poland would never accept German leadership, and that attempting to impose suzerainty over the state would only expose Germany to danger. He therefore suggested handing Congress Poland over to Austria-Hungary, not because this accorded with Polish wishes, but because he believed that it would contain the Polish nation in a fractured and constitutionally dysfunctional empire, essentially neutralizing it as a military threat.[1143]

Against this mounting criticism, proponents of multinational imperialism offered a beleaguered defense. Naumann and Rohrbach hardly bothered to contest nationalist complaints that Poles did not want to collaborate with the German Empire. Political crises in Poland had frustrated and disenchanted even persistent supporters of multinational union or confederation. They argued only that present tensions between Germans and Poles were more the result of wartime conditions and specific mistakes, and might be reconciled with time. Most now believed that the promise of mutual strategic gain would be insufficient to motivate Polish fidelity, and that Germany would need to rely more upon the naked application of force to police Warsaw's loyalty. Meinecke, for example, recommended a shadow annexation of the Narew line, suggesting that German troops occupy a series of fortifications along the river to secure Germany should Poland's faith waver.

Growing disapproval for multinational imperialism among Germany's intellectuals and publicists did not directly shape policy decisions in 1918. Nonetheless, the public's growing frustration with efforts to build a German-Polish union was important. At the beginning of the war, German national discourse produced two very different imperial paradigms: one based upon the repression and effacement of national and cultural diversity, the other explicitly committed to their institutionalization in a federalist system of collective security. Initially, debate between these models of ethnic management was fierce, but unresolved. By 1918, support for multinational imperialism was clearly in decline. Between 1916-1918, Germans had observed events in Poland, and more often than not had concluded that Poles could not be trusted to defend German interests, that they harbored designs on Prussian territory, that they would conspire with Germany's rivals, and that a Polish state would use its military and political resources to subvert and betray the German Empire. Many concluded that it was folly to hand the Polish nation its own kingdom, and train a Polish army to Prussian standards. Some further determined that the only way for the German Empire to achieve stable control over territory, would be to annex it and purge the territory of any residents who refused to Germanize. Multinationalist discourse was not dead in 1918, but it had sustained deep injuries. Its proponents were exhausted, discouraged, and uncertain. The successful creation of a stable and advantageous German-Polish union might have gradually revived support for this vision of imperial organization. Instead Germany's defeat and the dissolution of the occupation only further battered the paradigm.

When the German imperial power in Eastern Europe crumbled, many in Germany interpreted the collapse of the occupation in Poland as proof that Polish nationalists and leaders had long conspired against the German Empire, and that building a Polish state had only facilitated and encouraged Polish resistance. By late July 1918, the spring offensives had exhausted German military strength on the Western Front, and the strategic initiative passed to the Entente. On 8 August, the British and French forces launched the Battle of Amiens and advanced deep into German held-territory, accepting the surrender of scores of German soldiers. From here, Germany's military position on the western front deteriorated quickly under the weight of incessant offensives, now reinforced by a steady flow of fresh divisions from America. In late September, Hindenburg and Ludendorff approached the Kaiser to request an armistice with the Entente.[1144] In Warsaw, Polish leaders correctly inferred Germany's collapsing position and sought to capitalize on it. On 23 September, the Regency Council restored the Austrophile Kucharzewski to his position as Minister President. Beseler interpreted this as a sign that the

[1143] Delbrück, "Die Aufgaben Deutschlands im Osten und Westen – Mitteleuropa – Staatsekretär v. Kühlmann," 103.
[1144] Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15.

Polish government was beginning to explore alternatives to German suzerainty.[1145]

In October 1918, the imperial Government in Berlin began to unravel, while the Central Powers simultaneously lost effective control of Eastern Europe. On 3 October the Kaiser replaced Chancellor Hertling with Prince Max von Baden, who formed a new government with the participation of the SPD, and began earnest negotiations for an armistice.[1146] Four days later the new Chancellor informed the Regency Council in Warsaw of Berlin's intention to end the occupation in the immediate future.[1147] Hoping to retain a modicum of influence in Poland after the war, the GGW embarked upon a new press campaign to demonstrate the German Empire's effective support of Polish independence, and the two nations' common interest in combatting Bolshevism as allies.[1148] Berlin had effectively renounced its claims to suzerainty over Poland.

Austro-Hungarian authority cracked first. Militarily overtaxed and materially strained, Austro-Hungary's was unable to maintain effective control of its occupation Poland. On 14 October, the German representative to the K.u.K. military staff in Lublin reported urgently that the "insecurity in the countryside is growing considerably; almost daily Gendarmes are shot dead, mainly for the apparent purpose of seizing their weapons and munitions".[1149] Nationalist paramilitaries were even stopping trains to rob and kill Austro-Hungarian Gendarmes.[1150] The German observer worried that the GGL would soon collapse, in which case German occupation authorities would not be able to maintain effective control in the GGW. He recommended immediate evacuation. Indeed, Austria-Hungary's occupation force in the GGL soon began to pack up and depart for home, without Vienna's authorization. With no Austrian garrison in the GGL, Polish nationalists simply seized power.[1151] On 28 October, a Polish national council declared an independent Duchy of Cieszyn (Teschen), and announced their intention of joining the emerging Polish republic.[1152] In the now empty GGL, Poles in Lublin declared an independent Polish socialist republic on 7 November.[1153] The collapse of Austro-Hungarian control over the GGL, and subsequently in Galicia doomed German authority in the GGW.

It was only in this chaotic atmosphere, as German military strength wavered and the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, that German occupation authorities began to lose control in the GGW. From mid September, German consulates across Europe began to warn of an impending revolt in Poland.[1154] The consulate in Bern relayed alarming rumors of "impending terrorist attacks in Poland" supported by the "machinations of the Entente".[1155] On 1 October, PPS agents assassinated Erich Schultze, a high-ranking police functionary for the GGW, in Warsaw.[1156] As news of Germany's impending withdrawal spread throughout occupied Poland, GGW officials noted a sudden increase in popular agitation and demonstrations. The Chief of the Civilian Administration, recalled growing resistance to requisitions in early October, and that "German authorities had the greatest difficulty enforcing their orders" among a population that was increasingly "insolent" and "insubordinate".[1157] The Regency Council set to work consolidating their own rule. They called new elections for a Sejm to replace the State Council and on 12 October declared themselves the sovereign body of Poland with full authority over the

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[1145] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to the Imperial Chancellor, 23 September 1918," September 23, 1918, 20–23, N30/16, BArch.
[1146] Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 16.
[1147] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 209.
[1148] von Bethmann Hollweg, "Note to the Imperial Office of the Interior, 28 June 1917," 2.
[1149] German Representative to the GGL, "Report on Political Conditions in the GGL, 14 October 1918," October 14, 1918, 15, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1150] Ibid., 16.
[1151] Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:390.
[1152] Ibid.
[1153] Ibid.
[1154] Heinze, "Report from Consulate in Lemberg, 26 September 1918," September 26, 1918, 71, R1501/119717, BArch.
[1155] Romberg, "Report from the Consulate in Bern, 17 September 1918," September 17, 1918, 67, R1501/119717, BArch.
[1156] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 198.
[1157] von Steinmeister, "Report on Experience of the Dissolution of the GGW," December 8, 1918, 29, R1501/119726, BArch.

Polish army.[1158] The Polish government also began gathering veterans in Warsaw to swear a new service oath for the Polish army, this time to the Polish state alone.[1159] In a 17 October meeting the Chancellor, Foreign Office, OHL, and GGW decided to ratify the Regency Council's authority and hand over complete responsibility for administration to the Polish government.[1160] The transfer occurred on 23 October.[1161] By the end of October, the German-Polish union was a dead letter. The Austro-Hungarian occupation had evaporated, and the German occupation maintained a tenuous hold on power. Berlin had accepted that Poland would be fully sovereign after the war, but imperial authorities still hoped that rapid concessions might produce a friendly government in Warsaw.

Still, German policy-makers watched the unraveling of GGW authority with growing horror, and many suspected that the direst warnings of nationalizing imperialists were finally coming true. They worried that a Polish state, now in full possession of a trained and equipped army, would soon betray Germany, overthrowing the last vestiges of the occupation and march on German territory. In mid-October, Vice Chancellor Payer and the State Secretary of the RAI thus refused the application of a delegation of Polish Reichstag deputies to travel to Warsaw because, as the State Secretary wrote, "the purpose of the consultation in Warsaw doubtless concerns preparing for the cession of German territory".[1162] The Prussian government similarly began preparing for a domestic Polish revolt, supported by Warsaw, as a foregone conclusion. On 3 November, the District President of Oppeln advised Berlin to evacuate the GGW, arguing that only the immediate return of occupation troops could secure Germany's present borders and deter Polish Prussians from launching a revolt.[1163] He also hoped to distract Warsaw by exposing it to Bolshevik invasion.[1164]

On 2 November, Beseler filed his final report on the political situation in the GGW with Berlin. He too reported that the worst fears of the occupation government seemed to be coming true.[1165] With the collapse of the GGL and the inevitable incorporation of Galicia, Beseler reckoned that Germany would soon need to contend with a powerful Polish state, which he fully expected would be hostile to the German Empire. Popular "disgust" for the German occupation had become acute.[1166] A pro-Entente government would likely come to power in Warsaw.[1167] Beseler warned that his troops would not be able to effectively resist an organized attack by the "motley" but "considerable" army forming under the Polish government, especially after it assumed command of veterans from the former Russian and Austro-Hungarian armies.[1168] 20,000 Polish-speaking Austro-Hungarian veterans had already assembled in Lublin and sworn allegiance to the Regency Council.[1169] Beseler noted similar reports from Kraków.[1170] Against this mounting force the Governor General could field only 35 understrength battalions of reservists to defend the entire country, with little cavalry or artillery to supplement his strength.[1171] The German occupation, he stated bluntly would be "fairly powerless" in the face of a large popular

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[1158] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 209; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 224.
[1159] Julia Eichenberg, "Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War," in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwath and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 188.
[1160] Chancellery, "Results of Conference in RAI Regarding the 'Dissolution of the Occupation-Administration', 17 October 1918," October 14, 1918, 9, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1161] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 224.
[1162] Karl Trimborn, "Letter to Hans Hartwig von Beseler, 16 October 1918," October 16, 1918, 2, R1501/119735, BArch.
[1163] Wilhelm Drews, "Letter to the Imperial Chancellor, 3 November 1918," November 3, 1918, 32, R1501/119735, BArch.
[1164] Ibid., 33–34.
[1165] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Letter to Chancellor Baden, 2 November 1918," November 2, 1918, 62, R1501/119710, BArch.
[1166] Ibid., 63.
[1167] Ibid., 62.
[1168] Ibid., 63.
[1169] Ibid.
[1170] Ibid.
[1171] Ibid., 64.

insurrection or direct attack by the Polish army.[1172] Beseler therefore recommended the immediate and "complete evacuation" of the GGW, recognition of Poland's unqualified sovereignty, and shifting Berlin's focus to defending Germany's 1914 border from Polish claims.[1173] If Germany hesitated, and GGW units collapse during confrontation with Polish forces, he feared that Poles would seize Prussian territories in the ensuring chaos.

As the GGW's position grew more obviously precarious, Germans noted emerging Polish demands for Prussian territory. The German press denounced the growing chorus of Polish claims on the *Ostmark* as a grievous betrayal of the German Empire by Poland. Axel Schmidt complained that, despite all of Germany's state-building effort, "the political spirit in Poland, once condemned to inactivity·, celebrates chauvinistic orgies and even begins to stir wishes for the land of its liberators".[1174] The *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* similarly decried that Poles were now repaying German generosity with calls for the "unification of all formerly Polish lands into a unitary Polish state".[1175] Even the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, considered to be closely aligned with the FVP, complained that Germany had "reaped no thanks" from the Polish nation despite liberating it from the Russian Empire.[1176] The *Braunschweigische Landeszeitung* accused Polish politicians like Seyda and Korfanty of conspiring with the Regency Council to coordinate a Polish seizure of the Ostmark.[1177]

Der Reichsbote, a conservative press organ, began integrating the wartime occupation of Congress Poland into a grand narrative of Polish hostility and perfidy towards the German nation, even before the occupation finally collapsed. History had shown, *Der Reichsbote* contended, that Germany could gain nothing from attempting to negotiate or satisfy the demands of Poles. Throughout the 19th century, the author claimed, Prusso-German attempts to reconcile with Poles by relaxing Germanization efforts had only encouraged Poles to resist Prussian rule.[1178] The wartime effort to construct a friendly Polish state represented, to his mind, the culmination of this pattern, and had been met by Poles with "one betrayal after another". Rather than supporting the German war effort or showing any sort of gratitude to Berlin, he argued that Poles had only "intensified their outrageous and defiant conduct, their insolence and rapacity" had become "menacing and monstrous".[1179] Germany now faced a "greater-Polish danger". The author concluded by arguing that Germans needed to learn from the Poles, and focus on fortifying their "national unity" to more effectively defend Prussia.[1180]

On 29 October, sailors of the German high seas fleet anchored in Kiel mutinied, refusing to obey their officers' command to steam for the British blockade. Workers and soldiers garrisoned in Kiel soon joined the mutiny and took control of the city.[1181] They established Workers' and Soldiers' councils and began calling for the abdication of the Kaiser. The revolution quickly spread across Germany as towns and garrisons throughout the country emulated Kiel.[1182] As the empire fell into revolution, violent resistance to the GGW also spiked.[1183] One report for the *Kreisamt* in Koło identified 4 November as the day when violent resistance first became noticeably more common. At this point the "murders of German soldiers and

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[1172] Ibid.
[1173] Ibid., 63–64.
· This "inactivity" appears to be Schmidt's jab at Poles' refusal to enlist in the national army, and Poland's later hesitation to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers.
[1174] Axel Schmidt, "Die deutsche Demokratie und das Randstaatenproblem," *Deutsche Politik* 3 (October 25, 1918): 1372.
[1175] RAI, "Excerpt from From Münchener Neueste Nachrichten, 17 October 1918," October 17, 1918, 107, R1501/119719, BArch.
[1176] RAI, "Excerpt from the Frankfurter Zeitung, 14 October 1918," October 14, 1918, 97, R1501/119719, BArch.
[1177] Braunschweigische Landeszeitung, "Polnischer Uebermut," Oktober 1918, 108, R1501/119719, BArch.
[1178] Der Reichsbote, "Größer noch als Großpolen," October 22, 1918, 109, R1501/119719, BArch.
[1179] Ibid.
[1180] Ibid.
[1181] Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 17.
[1182] Ibid., 18.
[1183] GGW, "Aufzeichnung über die Vorgänge in Warschau in ider Zeit vom 10-20 November 1918," November 26, 1918, 125, R1501/119725, BArch.

bureaucrats multiplied, shootings in small cities and hamlets were reported from all sides".[1184]

On 9 November, both the German Empire and the GGW crumbled. Hearing of the revolutionary councils in Germany and lacking clear orders from Berlin, functionaries and soldiers of the occupation in Poland began establishing their own revolutionary councils.[1185] In response GGW leaders announced plans for its imminent withdrawal from Poland.[1186] Occupation leadership frantically telegrammed the Chancellery and the RAI to begin preparing for the transition, but Berlin was otherwise engaged.[1187] On the same day, mass demonstrations roiled in the capital and Max von Baden handed over the chancellorship to Friedrich Ebert, a Social Democrat.[1188] Philipp Scheidemann, also of the SPD, improvised the proclamation of a German republic and the Kaiser departed Berlin for exile. That same night, army officers informed the Civilian Administration of the GGW that they could no longer effectively protect the occupation's offices on *Sachsenplatz* due to a lack of reliable soldiers.[1189] At an emergency meeting, the occupation authorities unilaterally decided to dissolve and evacuate the Civilian Administration of the GGW.[1190] The following day, Piłsudski was released from his prison in Magdeburg and returned to Warsaw.[1191]

On 10 and 11 November Poles delivered the *coup de grâce.* Student activists and civilians began disarming German soldiers on the streets of Polish cities.[1192] On 11 November, Polish militias and paramilitary groups seized power from disorganized German authorities in Warsaw and throughout the GGW.[1193] There were poradic clashes between occupation troops and Polish insurgents.[1194] In Warsaw, Ernst von Glasenapp offered determined resistance. He summoned a small contingent of German troops from the nearby training facilities at Jablonna to the Police Presidium and held out for two days.[1195] The German soldiers' council in Włocławek, declined the offer of local Polish officers to voluntarily disarm and be escorted to the nearby border, and instead chose to evacuate their weapons by flotilla north along the Vistula.[1196] On the night of 12 November, they skirmished with Polish insurgents to cover the evacuation.[1197] But more often than not, the threat of violent uprising seems to have dissuaded any determined resistance to the coup by German army units. German soldiers frequently allowed themselves to be disarmed.[1198] The GGW administration quickly negotiated with Polish leaders, agreeing to relinquish all of the occupation's weapons in exchange for safe conduct to the German border.[1199]

The sudden totality of the GGW's collapse reinforced German suspicions that paramilitaries had long planned the coup with the widespread support of the population and the tacit assistance of the Polish government. The collapse of the GGW therefore reinforced, for German observers, the notion of a united, popular, well organized, and effective nationalist

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[1184] Fahn, "Abmarsch des Kreisamts Kolo, Generalgouvernement Warschau," November 14, 1918, 47, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1185] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 224; Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present*, 2:391.
[1186] Deutsche Warschauer Zeitung, "Report on the Dissolution of the GGW," 1918, 28, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1187] Hans Hartwig von Beseler, "Telegram to the Imperial Chancellor, 9 November 1918," November 9, 1918, 12, R1501/119711, BArch.
[1188] Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 19.
[1189] von Steinmeister, "Report on Experience of the Dissolution of the GGW," 30.
[1190] Ibid.
[1191] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 152; Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 224.
[1192] Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungs-Chefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," January 8, 1919, 17, R1501/119726, BArch.
[1193] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 226.
[1194] Karl von Carmer, "Report to Undersecretary Lewald, 19 November 1918," November 19, 1918, 70, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1195] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 212; Schlesische Zeitung, "Die Verschärfung der polnischen Frage eine Folge der deutschen Revolution," December 4, 1918, 117, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1196] Zivilverwaltung des GGWs, "Bericht: Auflösung Der Zivilverwaltung in Wloclawek Berlin, 29 November 1918," November 29, 1918, 101, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1197] Ibid., 102.
[1198] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 226.
[1199] Ibid.

movement. The collage of Legionnaires, soldiers, Dowbor-Muśnicki veterans, students, government officials, and other paramilitaries which participated suggested a popular backing for the coup to German eyes, a near uniform wave of Polish nationalist fervor.[1200] German witnesses suspected that the coup was planned and well coordinated. Polish forces quickly seized official archives.[1201] German authorities reported that Polish students and soldiers seemed to have a remarkable familiarity with GGW offices, and that their Polish co-workers in these offices didn't seem at all shocked by the arrival of insurgents.[1202] To the overwhelmed occupation personnel, it seemed that the leadership and institutions of the Polish government had extensively coordinated the seizure of power. The German Criminal Police in the Central Police Station in Warsaw, for instance, were first approached and disarmed on 10 November by a group of their Polish colleagues in the Police administration.[1203] The men so carefully cultivated by the GGW to assist in maintaining order, and indeed previously celebrated as a visible achievement of German-Polish cooperation, were now working to topple the occupation.[1204]

German observer's also suspected that sympathetic Polish elites would not have been able to stop the wave of nationalist energy even if they had tried. The coup seemed to unseat any Polish authorities willing to make reasonable arrangements with German authorities. As the occupation collapsed, Steinmeister recalled making arrangements with Polish officers or the Polish Interior Ministry regarding the transfer of authority.[1205] Invariably, he complained, some armed contingent of the POW would arrive later and, refusing to recognize the authority of the previous negotiators, would demand more immediate results.[1206] The Polish takeover of the GGW finance department is particularly instructive. German officials arrived on the morning of 11 November to that find a contingent of the POW had broken into the office's safes and were now counting their contents.[1207] One official confronted the POW's leader, indicating that the contents of the safe were the rightful property of the German Empire. When the paramilitaries ignored him, the official telephoned the Polish Interior Ministry, who agreed that the POW unit was out of bounds, and dispatched a contingent of Polish soldiers to sort out the situation. Upon arriving, the Polish officer argued briefly with the leader of the POW. As a compromise, he permitted the audit to continue under military supervision.[1208] After the soldiers departed however, the POW men arrested the German official on suspicion of corruption.[1209] When the Polish soldiers returned, they refused, this time, to intervene on behalf of the finance department official, claiming that "they had no authority over the POW".[1210] The GGW treasury ultimately fell into the POW's hands.[1211] The German official emphasized that "the POW committed the coup [in the Finance Department] on its own initiative and against the will of the Polish government".[1212] Indeed Polish activists soon swept from power any political elites deemed to close to the occupation. One GGW official recalled a "major gunfight" on the night of 13 November, and that a bomb had been thrown into the courtyard of Archbishop Kakowski to convince him to resign from the

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[1200] Liquidierungskommission des D.S.R. Warschau, "Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Deutschen Soldatenrats Warschau," Dezember 1918, 114, R1501/119726, BArch.
[1201] Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 211; Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungschefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," January 8, 1919, 19, R1501/119726, BArch.
[1202] Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungschefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," 19.
[1203] von Steinmeister, "Report on Personal Experience of Revolution in Warsaw," December 8, 1918, 31, R1501/119726, BArch.
[1204] Ibid.
[1205] Ibid., 33.
[1206] Ibid., 34.
[1207] Ueberschaer, "Report on the Requisition of the Finance Department on 11 November 1918," November 11, 1918, 40, R1501/119726, BArch.
[1208] Ibid.
[1209] Ibid.
[1210] Ibid.
[1211] Ibid., 43.
[1212] Ibid.

Regency Council.[1213] Days later, mass demonstrations on Sachsenplatz ejected the Regency Council from office.[1214] Piłsudski was granted dictatorial powers.[1215] To German eyes, the coup seemed like an expression of popular nationalist fervor and discontent. They interpreted Piłsudski and his followers in the P.O.W. as the institutional manifestation of this popular nationalism.[1216] The coup, in other words, was perceived by Germans as a perfectly distilled repudiation of a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism. Germany had failed to manipulate Polish national sentiment through influential native elites. Instead, the authentic national will of the demos expressed itself by toppling the German occupation and any native officials who might be willing to negotiate with Berlin.

German personnel therefore interpreted the collapse of the occupation as a moment in which Poles had ended dissimulation and revealed their authentic, anti-German sentiments. These, German personnel concluded, had always existed, but the population had bided their time until the occupation seemed weak enough to topple. Occupation soldiers recalled that businessmen and shop owners, who had days before "served their German patrons in essentially friendly tones" now acted with reserve or hostility, while students rudely challenged German soldiers in the streets.[1217] A former official of the GGW press department described how, only four weeks before the coup, the editor in chief of the *Przegląd Poranny* had declared, in the name of all Varsovian newspapers, that "'The Poles would never forget the Germans, that they [Poland] had been liberated by them [Germany]'". During the coup, however, the editor had shown his true feelings, calling for Poles to focus on "pushing the Polish border westward, as far as possible" and lauding efforts by Polish publicists throughout Europe to stain Germany with "the stench of barbarism".[1218] German observers therefore concluded that regardless of their wartime cooperation or rhetoric, the prospect of domestic autonomy or further concessions had never really enticed the leaders or people of Poland. Poles, they determined, had always intended to betray the German Empire. Polish national sentiment appeared both immune to German manipulation, and irreconcilably hostile to the now crumbling German Empire.

In the immediate wake of the GGW's collapse, therefore, German occupation personnel and German publicists already began to integrate the coup into a broader narrative of inevitable German-Polish enmity. Reactions in the press to the collapse of occupation authority quickly subscribed to the notion that Beseler and his administration had not fundamentally understood Poles. They concluded that the German administration had only been deceiving itself in thinking that Poles could be reasoned or negotiated with, and had failed to use sufficient force and repression to clamp down on Polish nationalism.[1219] Authors wrote that the GGW, by attempting to establish a reliable German protectorate, had in fact only supplied the Polish nation with a state and army which it would now deploy against Germany.[1220] The incompetent occupation, they argued, had even allowed themselves to be duped by the population, enabling Poles to disarm the occupation and equip their own army with German heavy weapons.[1221] GGW personnel began to agree with nationalizing imperialists that Poland's betrayal had been inevitable. One official report claimed that, to understand the "sudden flare up of the Polish uprising spread over the entire country", one had to remember that Poles had expected freedom in 1915, and that the subsequent German occupation and plans for multinational union had always disappointed these

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[1213] Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungschefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," 22.
[1214] Ibid.
[1215] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 152.
[1216] Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungschefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," 19.
[1217] Liquidierungskommission des D.S.R. Warschau, "Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Deutschen Soldatenrats Warschau," 114.
[1218] Abwicklungsstelle der Presseabteilung des Verwaltungschefs, "Bericht über die übergabe der Presseabteilung in Warschau an die Polen, 8 Januar 1919," 23.
[1219] Der Tag, "Die Vertreibung der Deutschen Aus Polen," November 19, 1918, 57, R1501/119725, BArch.
[1220] Ibid.
[1221] Ibid.; Liquidierungskommission des D.S.R. Warschau, "Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Deutschen Soldatenrats Warschau," 114.

nationalist expectations.[1222] Neither the Polish state nor nationalist paramilitaries had every really faithfully worked with the German Empire, the report concluded.[1223] Legionnaires had refused to take the oath. The POW had undermined the occupation.[1224] The veterans of Dowbor-Muśnicki's corps, disarmed and "filled by an extraordinary bitterness against Germany", frustrated workers, and "circles of nationally minded" students had all provided ready material for the revolt.[1225] The report ultimately portrayed Poland as a cohesive nation, capable of coordinating remarkably effective resistance. The ethno-political situation in the GGW, the report claimed, was "fundamentally different" than the situation in Ober Ost.

> There [in Ober Ost] no unified, cohesive, organized people [*Volk*], here [in Congress Poland], a prepared power of resistance, united in its struggle against the Germans despite all internal strife, a power, which already during the time of the occupation possessed sympathies and relations in the German offices of the occupation. Besides the Hakatists, whose methods must have wounded and incited the Poles, sat in these offices people – officers, bureaucrats, and squads of German citizenship and Polish linguistic affiliation [*Sprachzugehörigkeit*], who on Sunday after the collapse marched in the Poles' demonstrations and triumphal parades as "representatives of Greater-Poland" (of Posen), hat in hand, obligingly thankful for the greeting calls bestowed to them.[1226]

The report therefore suggested not only that the German Empire had been wrong to trust a foreign Polish state, but also that many Polish-speaking Germans had betrayed their country's interests. Many German observers therefore interpreted the turbulent occupation and eventual collapse of German rule in Poland as a repudiation of multinationalism as a model of imperial organization. Only national homogeneity, they believed, could ensure the political integrity and security of the state.

Historians have often agreed, perhaps unintentionally, with the judgement of these occupation officials, arguing that there was never any real prospect for the success of Germany's multinationalist imperial project in Poland. Scholars have suggested that Polish nationalist sentiment was too popular and stubbornly oriented-towards independence to domesticate. In the years after WWI, Polish historiography crafted a mythology of near unanimous Polish resistance to each of the partitioning powers during the war. Polish historians portrayed uprisings against foreign rule as broadly popular revolutions as a means of reinforcing the legitimacy of the Polish republic as an expression of national self-determination.[1227] More recently Jesse Kauffman has argued that nationalist political movements in Polish society were already "too well-organized, to make it conceivable that a German-dominated Polish state would have been stable and durable".[1228] Certainly, this was the lesson that many German observers took from the collapse of the GGW, but German interpretations of the collapse of the GGW were colored by years of frustration stemming from political frictions and unrealized expectations in occupied-Poland. Their fears were further exaggerated by the shock of defeat on the Western Front the reality of imperial cataclysm. Before moving on, however, it is worth considering the accuracy of this assessment. The GGW, deserves a post-mortem. Why did Germany's project to obtain security through a dependent client state fail?

The simple answer is that Germany lost the war. Battlefield defeat and the collapse of Berlin's authority over its war-weary and demoralized forces opened a power vacuum in the Kingdom of Poland, which Polish nationalist organizations quickly filled. Despite the often

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[1222] Liquidierungskommission des D.S.R. Warschau, "Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Deutschen Soldatenrats Warschau," 114.
[1223] Ibid.
[1224] Ibid.
[1225] Ibid.
[1226] Ibid.
[1227] Eichenberg, "Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War," 191.
[1228] Kauffman, "Sovereignty and the Search for Order," 243.

serious unrest engendered by wartime deprivation and political grievances, overt and active resistance to the occupation remained a largely underground affair until the late summer of 1918, after Germany's military position had already become precarious. We cannot know if a German-sponsored Polish government would have survived long if Germany had achieved victory on the Western front or concluded a reasonably favorable negotiated settlement to the war. However, despite Beseler's constant warnings of his own insufficient manpower, political unrest in Poland did not seriously threaten to overthrow the GGW until final weeks of the war. Throughout this time, the German occupation could rely upon a core group of Polish elites who invested in the success of a German-Polish union and attempted to foster its success. The eager vision of German-Polish reconciliation espoused by sympathetic political leaders and publicists demonstrates that Poles could reconcile their national patriotism with a vision of multinational union. Through the summer of 1918, Poland's small national army willingly cooperated with the German Empire, and occupation officials were cautiously optimistic that it would serve its original objective. The Roman Catholic episcopate was also unlikely to seriously challenge the legitimacy of a Polish kingdom under German suzerainty. Monarchy was still the preferred political system of Catholic political theology and one of the most likely alternatives to German sponsorship was Bolshevism. The tepid cooperation of former Austrophiles in 1918 should also not be ignored. When German hegemony in Eastern Europe appeared increasingly inevitable in the final year of the war, many Polish leaders began to understand collaboration with the German Empire as a practical necessity, regardless of their own preferences. The grand bargain seemed like the best deal they could get. Even in early September, GGW and Foreign Office officials felt confident that many Poles already saw the advantages of military and political union with Germany, or would come to accept it as legitimate in time.[1229] These same officials worried, however, about rumors of Germany's imminent military defeat already circulating in Poland, from which Polish agitators had concluded that they need only wait out the GGW, and then seize independence.[1230]

When the occupation ended, Polish actors indeed stepped into a power-vacuum. At the front of every biannual report, Beseler had complained of a net loss of unit strength, as able-bodied troops were siphoned off to the front-lines or factory floors. What units were left in November of 1918 were understrength and composed of older troops. By the end of the war, Beseler was holding the Government General of Warsaw with a fragile array of military power. Only after the German Empire had long ago renounced its claims to suzerainty, only after an independent Polish state was already emerging in the vacuum left by Austria-Hungary in the GGL and Galicia, only as German divisions were retreating across Northern France, only as revolution seized the German capital and major cities, only as occupation troops began to join the revolution themselves, and only as their officers acknowledged their inability to control the situation, did Polish nationalists attempt to seize power. Even Nethe, one of the most anti-Polish officials in the GGW, estimated in the summer of 1918 that the POW would not dare revolt until German military strength clearly wavered on the Western Front.[1231] Neither the German occupiers nor Poles themselves really believed that Polish paramilitary groups possessed sufficient strength, resources, or popular support to independently topple the German army.

The difficulty experienced by the Polish government in mobilizing its population immediately after 1918 also suggests that the broader Polish-speaking population may have been less than stubbornly committed to the nationalist agenda. Warsaw found it incredibly difficult to mobilize recruits to fight for Poland in the series of border-conflicts which embroiled the region until 1921. Flows of volunteers were not reliable, and nationalist paramilitaries frequently relied on dragooning reluctant conscripts into their ranks, often against heavy local opposition.[1232] In the

[1229] Kaiserlich Deutsches Kommissariat bei der königlich polnischen Staaatsregierung, "Bericht über die Staatsratssitzung, 2-6 September 1918," September 9, 1918, 98, R1501/119705, BArch.
[1230] Ibid.
[1231] Nethe, "Report to the Imperial Chancellor, 25 August 1918," 58.
[1232] Eichenberg, "Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War," 191.

conflict over Lwów / Lviv, many Polish fighters had to be press-ganged into service.[1233] 1,400 of the 6,000 Polish defenders of the city were under 18 years old. The youngest was 9.[1234] Many units in the Polish military were little more than local "anti-communist" peasant militias until 1920.[1235] As was the case across Europe, Polish civilians were generally exhausted by war and had little appetite for continued political violence.[1236]

A significant measure of the political discontent in Poland was also caused by conditions related to the war itself. Shortages and material and food related to the British blockade and German requisitioning caused deep resentment among Poles towards the German occupation. Specific and often ill-advised German policies often exacerbated Polish disaffection. Berlin erred, for instance, in attempting to immediately recruit a Polish army for deployment in the present war. This effectively mortgaged the achievement of Germany's long-term objectives in Poland for short-term personnel gains. Without erecting concrete political institutions beforehand, and coming only days after the announcement of Polish statehood, the occupied population, and many subsequent historians, interpreted 5 November as a transparent and disingenuous grab for cannon-fodder. It ruined months of careful preparation and progress by Beseler's administration. After November 1916, the GGW made halting progress in building a Polish state, but it was never enough to completely dispel Poles' understandable misgivings about Germany's intentions.

The German occupation was effectively hobbled in its ability to quickly build organize Polish government institutions by the unwillingness of Vienna to finally disengage from its own Polish-occupation. Austria-Hungary's continued presence in the GGL required Berlin to engage in lengthy negotiations with Vienna before Beseler could implement any major decisions regarding the Polish government. The chronic and chief complaint of Polish nationalists and fence-sitters throughout the war was the slow or insufficient progress in actually building a Polish state. But this glacial progress was less a product of German duplicity or hesitation, and more a result of tensions with Austria-Hungary.

Berlin also shot itself in the foot by failing to coordinate a politically coherent program of war aims and occupation policy. Germany's ambitious agenda in Eastern Europe often exacerbated Polish frustrations and fears. The desire to purchase influence in Ukraine through the cession of Chełm yielded mixed results for Berlin. The arrogance and abuses of the German occupation of Ober Ost was a less ambiguous case. Ober Ost's provocatively anti-Polish measures, heavy-handed rule, and rapacious economic policy all undercut Beseler's own efforts to portray the German Empire as a reasonable and relatively pro-Polish partner. That the Prussian government made only slow progress in qualifying or dismantling the architecture of *Ostmarkenpolitik* certainly didn't inspire confidence across the border.

Finally, the German Empire's unwillingness to clarify some or all of the future borders of Poland naturally stoked Polish fears that Berlin would claim and Germanize massive annexations. By 1916, the OHL, GGW, and *Reichsleitung* had reached broad agreement on limiting annexations to the Bobr-Narew line. Their reluctance to describe Poland's borders stemmed from their concern that even this line would provoke international anger, and because German leaders still disagreed about how far east Poland should extend. Poles, understandably, often interpreted this indeterminate border as an omen of German expansionism, and the open question became synonymous with fears of an impending 'fourth partition'. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as a lack of forthcoming collaboration convinced more and more observers in Berlin that a satellite Kingdom of Poland would be a chink in Germany's armor, rather than part of its wall to the east.

Despite all of this, Germany's political position in Poland remained remarkably advantageous until the army's collapse. In the event of a German military victory or negotiated

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[1233] Eichenberg, "Consent, Coercion and Endurance in Eastern Europe: Poland and the Fluidity of War Experiences," 247.
[1234] Eichenberg, "Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War," 192.
[1235] Ibid.
[1236] See also, Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Berg, 2011).

defeat, Germany would have possessed a near monopoly of military force in Poland and much of Eastern Europe. German suzerainty would have been difficult to resist, especially as the prospect of autonomy and greater concessions in Eastern Europe would offer powerful incentives for collaboration.

Conclusion

German writers routinely portrayed WWI as a heroic crusade against the barbarism of the Russian Empire. Barbarism meant different things to different people. For some, the Slavs of Eastern Europe were themselves a barbarian horde, a racially inferior and primitive swarm which threatened to consume German space and vandalize Teutonic achievements. Many intellectuals, writers, imperial officials, and military commanders disagreed with this definition. They identified Russia's barbarism with the Tsarist government's efforts to stabilize control over territory through the repression of national and cultural diversity. Barbaric, they argued, was the Russian government's systematic exclusion of Poles from government, its withdrawal of protections for Polish property, and its incessant efforts to Russify education. Barbaric, they argued, was the Russian Empire's deportation of loyal ethnic German and Jewish subjects, and the bald theft of their property on a massive scale. Barbaric, they argued, were the vast evacuations of Polish subjects eastward, the first step, they suspected, in achieving Petrograd's grand vision of a Russified western frontier. Critics of Russian ethnic management excoriated the Tsarist government for its efforts to disenfranchise, expropriate, deport, or expel its own subjects based on their nationality. At its core, their critique indicted Petrograd for its apparent determination to crush any ethnic or cultural identity which undercut the national homogeneity of the Russian Empire. Russification, they argued, represented an attack on cultural diversity which threatened to impoverish humanity.

For these German intellectuals and policy-makers, civilization was not defined purely by literary pedigree, aesthetic accomplishment, or other cultural achievements. For them, civilization demanded the tolerance, appreciation, and defense of cultural diversity. Germany's mission, they argued, was not to foist German *Kultur* on the peoples and regions of Europe, but to rally the threatened nations of Europe in a crusade for the preservation of a culturally rich and pluriform occident. Influential Germans therefore laid out a confident vision of a future German Empire, one where Germany's expanded influence could integrate diverse cultures for the sake of common progress, and unified strength.

By 1918, however, Germans had begun to lose faith in this vision of civilization. Where writers and policy-makers had once considered explicit assurances for cultural diversity essential to imperial unity, they increasingly understood ethnic heterogeneity to be incompatible with the strength and stability of the German Empire. Indeed, national heterogeneity increasingly seemed to augur the collapse of imperial structures into fratricidal chaos. Barbarism, to many observers, seemed the only reliable means for sustaining the unity and security of the German state.

Germany entered WWI with two distinct visions of ethnic management already developed in the context of debates over Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik*. Establishing German influence in Congress Poland required policy-makers in Berlin to select one of these paradigms to structure both occupation policy and Germany's imperial organization more broadly. German imperialists of all stripes considered control of Congress Poland indispensible for the future security and survival of the German Empire. To their eyes, Congress Poland was a Russian dagger, stabbing into the soft flesh of Germany's indefensible eastern border. If Russia still held the region after the war, Germans feared, a future conflict between Russia and Germany would be disastrous. In the first hours of this conflict, they imagined, Russian guns would shell Upper Silesia as the Russian vanguard overran first Posen and then Berlin. At conference tables in Berlin and in the columns of wartime publications, German imperialists therefore prioritized seizing control of part or all Congress Poland, or at least to denying the region to Petrograd.

But intellectuals and policy-makers struggled with how to integrate the population of Congress Poland into a German imperial system. Imperialists broadly acknowledged that a disgruntled Polish population could cause severe problems for the German Empire. Nationalist organizations like the Pan-German League and *Ostmarkenverein* peppered their brochures with depictions of the Polish nation as culturally primitive and politically incompetent, but their assertions of German superiority usually veiled deep anxieties about the potential for Poles to organize a sophisticated and powerful challenge to German rule. Other intellectuals and policy-makers recognized Poland as a *kulturfähig* nation, one which had produced scientific luminaries

like Marie Curie and literary masters like Mickiewicz. Polish culture could offer customs, traditions, and a sense of common history to attract and bind Polish speakers into a strong socio-political community. Many German imperialists understood that this *Kulturfähigkeit* meant that most Poles would not willingly abandon their own traditions to espouse a German identity. They balked at attempting to suppress Polish identity, believing that humanity had been meaningfully enriched by the contributions of Polish culture. Moreover, these imperialists insisted that Poland was a *staatsfähig* nation, capable of sustaining complex political organization. They recalled that the Polish nobility had once ruled one of the great powers of Europe and that Polish culture was obviously capable of producing political leaders of sufficient intelligence and caliber to manage their own affairs. German intellectuals and policy-makers cautioned that contemporary Polish elites could effectively mobilize the Polish masses to defend their shared national community.

The recognition of Polish political sophistication strongly influenced how German imperialists thought about questions of imperial expansion and ethnic management. With few exceptions, German imperialists believed that it would be disastrous to annex Polish territory without significantly adjusting Berlin's strategy of ethnic management. Annexing part or all of Congress Poland would flood the German Empire with a new body of Polish-speaking citizens. Poles, Germans feared, would chafe under *Ostmarkenpolitik* and resent the extension of German power as a new and humiliating partition. The ballooning Polish population could reinforce opposition to the government in the Reichstag and obstruct the smooth functioning of the German legislative system. Worse yet, Germans feared that Polish elites would aspire to political independence and organize resistance to German rule. Nightmares of Polish conspiracies and nationalist revolutions haunted German planners.

German imperialists developed two paradigms for resolving this security paradox, distinguished by their assumptions on how national identity affected political loyalty. Those who rigidly equated national and political allegiance favored a nationalizing model of ethnic management. Support was concentrated among National Liberals, some conservatives, and the emerging far right of the political spectrum. Nationalist pressure groups like the Pan-German League and *Ostmarkenverein* became particularly vocal advocates for this method of expansion. These groups tended to subscribe to an exaggerated version of the German national narrative, one which understood cultural diversity as an urgent threat to political unity and imperial security. They urged Berlin to fortify the German Empire from this threat by suppressing or expunging alternative ethnic identities. The most restrained proposals imagined establishing permanent military governments to rule over annexations in Poland as quasi-colonial possessions. Poles would be excluded from the political system and denied legal rights. Lacking formal constitutional restraints, military or colonial governors would be free to improvise new policies of ethnic management as conditions required. More interventionist proposals called on Berlin to aggressively colonize annexed territory with politically reliable ethnic Germans until Poles represented a small minority in the region. The most radical of nationalizing imperialists called for the expropriation and expulsion of some or all of the non-German residents from an annexed border-strip. Only by expelling the native Polish population, these writers believed, could the German Empire assure its lasting control over annexed territory.[1] Proposals for ethnic cleansing in Poland circulated publicly in 1914, but even proponents of nationalizing imperialism often considered this solution too radical to implement.

In the first years of WWI nationalizing models of ethnic management faced strong criticism from Germans who believed that national identity did not determine political loyalty. These policy-makers and intellectuals certainly recognized that nationality generated certain political claims, including demands for access to vernacular education and government support for cultural institutions. They also understood that linguistic minorities desired access to positions of influence in the government or administration, without having to abandon their cultural identity or master the German language. However, these Germans understood loyalty to the state as a mutable rather than essential characteristic. They shared two fundamental assumptions about the nature of political loyalty. First, they emphasized that loyalty was a

[1] Some proposals also called for the expulsion of resident Jews.

transactional, rather than essential characteristic, wherein a subject's commitment to a particular polity would ebb and flow according to a number of factors. Secondly, they tended to acknowledge that political, social, and intellectual elites could exercise a significant degree of influence over the political sentiments and the organization of their society. They espoused a more leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism, wherein notables were considered very capable of reshaping the *vox populi* within a basic set of parameters.

Members of the *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* and other left liberals were especially disposed to understand loyalty as a transactional relationship between the state and its subjects. Much of their domestic policy focused on reinforcing the German State's appeal to the rising industrial proletariat, buying their continued loyalty to Germany's constitutional system and capitalist economy through social reforms, and thereby fortifying the solidarity of the German Empire. Moderate conservatives, focused as they were on preserving the leading role of notables in German politics, were more inclined to adopt a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism. Roman Catholicism's structural and theological commitments to universalism, as well as its doctrinal commitment to the principle of political legitimacy, discouraged German Catholics and Center Party representatives from conflating national culture and political loyalty. While acknowledging national diversity as an instrument of divine will and a boon to human progress, Catholic writers were less likely to see national self-determination as a legitimate basis for political organization. German Catholics generally rejected exceptional anti-Polish legislation, fearing that such measures might serve as a legal precedent for later attacks on confessional equality. German Catholics could easily sympathize with Poles, as they too had suffered many of the same unfounded accusations of imperial disloyalty and international conspiracy.

Influential voices in each of these political movements concluded that Polish nationals could be persuaded to accept German imperial leadership if they felt it adequately served their interests. They therefore developed a multinational model of imperial expansion premised on a grand bargain between the Polish nation and the German Empire. A Polish Kingdom was to be founded on the soil of Congress Poland, and granted a robust degree of domestic political autonomy which would fulfill Poles' aspirations for self-governance. A Polish king and a Polish administration would govern this new state. Polish police would enforce its laws and regulations. Citizens of Poland would elect their own parliament, educate their children in Polish schools, and study in Polish universities. A Polish national army would even train citizens to defend their country and safeguard its autonomy. With such a broad degree of self-government, multinationalists felt confident that Poles would accept Berlin's control over a common German-Polish foreign policy and the Kaiser's joint command over the armies of Germany and Poland in the event of war. Suzerainty would satisfy Berlin's strategic priorities in the region, shortening and fortifying the imperial border with Russia, while simultaneously expanding the military resources at Germany's disposal. Multinationalists believed that Poles would recognize the advantages of military and political union, and would accept German suzerainty as legitimate and necessary for protecting their kingdom from Russian expansionism. If they could convince the Prussian state to dismantle its Germanization policies in the *Ostmark*, multinationalists were sure that Poles would rally around German leadership as a benign alternative to Russification.

Three phenomena significantly reinforced multinationalists' confidence in the German Empire's ability to build a durable union with a Polish national kingdom. First, the successful mobilization of Polish-speaking Prussians in the first months of the war vividly demonstrated that Polish identity could be compatible with loyal service to the German state. There was no wave of sabotage or strikes to disrupt the war effort. Polish Prussians mustered to the colors largely without incident and fought bravely at the front. Polish deputies in the Reichstag voted for war credits. Even the *Ostmarkenverein* had difficulty manufacturing scandals to defame their Polish countrymen. Nationalist publications instead urged their readers not to let the apparent civic integrity of Poles deceive them. Multinationalist publicists and German policy-makers observed the faithful service of Polish Prussians and drew a more reasonable conclusion. If Poles could be loyal to the Prussian state and the German Empire, despite decades of Germanization efforts, Berlin could expect yet more robust loyalty if it made concessions to reasonable national demands.

Secondly, the durability of Austria-Hungary in the first years of the war offered apparent proof that empires populated by several national identities could cohere in times of emergency. Austria-Hungary did not, as doomsayers had predicted, unravel at the seams in 1914. The South Slavs of the empire did not betray their Kaiser and rally to the Serbian cause, but instead served faithfully in the k.u.k. army, even in the invasion of Serbia. To multinationalists in Germany, the outbreak of war appeared to reinvigorate the latent bonds of imperial solidarity as Austria-Hungary's various communities rallied to defend an empire they valued and depended upon. Some German writers even penned odes to the Austrian spirit, arguing that the Habsburg dynasty expressed the tolerant and cosmopolitan potential of the German national tradition. If many still considered the constitutional architecture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire dysfunctional, they were nonetheless impressed by the empire's durability in the opening months of the war.

Thirdly, early assessments of the political climate in occupied-Poland convinced German imperialists that Poles could be persuaded to regard a German-Polish union as legitimate. Occupation officials in Warsaw and throughout the GGW interpreted the absence of resistance to the German presence as a sign of popular ambivalence towards the contest between Petrograd and Berlin. Administrators perceived a growing antipathy towards the Russian Empire among the Polish population, and they hoped to marshal this animosity to establish the legitimacy of German suzerainty as a shield against Russian ambitions. The leaders of the GGW reached several conclusions that bulwarked their optimism for long term German-Polish collaboration. To begin with, they perceived hardline support for national independence as relatively marginal. While many Poles might prefer national independence, occupation leaders still doubted that any sizeable faction would fight just to achieve sovereignty. They believed they could negotiate with Polish nationalists, and that Poles would accept something less than complete independence. Indeed, German occupation officials dismissed the POW as a minor threat early in the war primarily because they considered it a small, poor, and internally divided organization whose members were only tenuously committed to its goals. German officials concluded that most of the Polish population would not actively intervene to achieve any particular national objectives, but would accept German leadership, so long as it did not further infringe upon the material welfare and cultural interests of the Polish people. As the occupation developed and enmeshed itself into the political system of Congress Poland, German officials concluded that they could cultivate a caste of sympathetic Polish elites with sufficient influence to shape the opinions of the broader Polish population and gradually consolidate support for a permanent German-Polish union. Polish landowners, the Catholic episcopate, and moderate nationalists, they believed, could all be convinced that Poland had a compelling interest in working with Germany to defend its border with Russia. An officer-corps trained by German personnel and new university-educated bureaucrats would soon fill out the ranks of these sympathetic elites, and reorient Polish national discourse in a pro-German direction. Poland's peasantry and industrial workers would eventually follow these elites in accepting the German-Polish union as a normal and necessary stanchion of Polish nationhood.

Finally German imperialists believed they had effective constitutional instruments for managing Polish nationalism at their disposal. They were confident that they could develop an efficient and stable imperial structure by replicating the basic architecture of the German Empire's federal constitution on a larger scale. With few exceptions, multinationalist proposals for projecting imperial influence over Congress Poland drew heavily on the model of German federalism. Intellectuals and policy-makers explicitly referred to, and built upon, the federal constitution when advocating the integration of a Kingdom of Poland into a German imperial structure. In many cases, the only substantive difference between a federal state of the German Empire and a Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty would be Poland's lack of representation in the Reichstag. Even this was not consistent across multinationalist proposals. Even if they refrained from offering Poland seats in the Reichstag, many proposals still recommended admitting deputies of the Kingdom of Poland into the Bundesrat. Multinationalists also frequently suggested permitting representatives from the Kingdom of Poland to vote, along with Reichstag representatives, on issues of common interest, such as tariff legislation. Seeking to bypass these complicated constitutional distinctions, some multinationalists discussed simply

integrating Poland as the 5th federal kingdom of the German Empire.

Multinationalists firmly believed that German-style federalism effectively balanced particularist demands with the need for central governance in military, foreign policy, and fiscal affairs. By restricting the central government's jurisdiction to matters to collective security and trade, multinationalists believed that federalism preserved the cultural and political autonomy of its constituent states. Federal states could craft policies to serve the particular confessional and cultural interests of their residents, without meddling from Berlin. Indeed, the preservation of autonomous federal armies offered a robust guarantee of states' rights. At the same time, Berlin's unchallenged authority to direct foreign policy and its capacity to organize and wield the combined armies of the empire in the event of war ensured that the German Empire could effectively defend collective imperial interests on the international stage. Multinationalist intellectuals were confident that Poles would accept a German-Polish union or membership in *Mitteleuropa* as legitimate for the same reasons that states like Bavaria, Saxony, or Württemberg had accepted the German Empire as legitimate. Just as the German Empire had protected the federal states' ability to govern their own affairs and develop their own cultural identities, so to would a German-Polish union grant wide ranging autonomy to the Kingdom of Poland while defending it from the appetites of Russian expansionism. Multinational imperialists were confident that Berlin could integrate Poland as a reliable component of the German Empire, because they believed that Germany had already accomplished a similar feat four decades before. In their reading of German history, institutional protections for diversity appeared to reinforce, rather than endanger, imperial solidarity and collective security.

Multinational imperialists' proposals drew upon this robust federalist tradition of German nationalism. Federalist nationalism lauded the intellectual and cultural productivity fostered by the cultural, confessional, and political diversity of the German nation. It celebrated federalism as a means to support and protect this diversity. Germany, multinationalists believed, could only benefit from integrating the creativity of the Polish nation into its imperial structure. Multinational imperialism was not the quixotic interest of a few isolated thinkers. It drew upon a deep reservoir of German national discourse and collective memory which made the imperial model easily legible to both policy-makers and the broader public.

Several factors actually had surprisingly little impact on how German imperialists developed policies for extending German influence over Congress Poland in WWI. German imperialists did not automatically draw inspiration from colonial models of rule to inform their proposals for Poland. Certainly some nationalizing imperialists copied policies of racial segregation from Germany's colonies for use in Poland, and some of their plans for autocratic rule, colonization, and ethnic cleansing closely paralleled practices already extant overseas. However, German imperialists only selected these models of imperial management if they had already concluded that Poles were more or less inherently hostile to the German Empire. If, however, they believed in the possibility of German-Polish reconciliation, even ardent supporters of colonialism in Africa eschewed colonial policies of ethnic management in Poland.

Belief in the German nation's inherent superiority over the Polish nation exercised strikingly little influence on German imperial strategies in WWI. Multinationalists recognized Poland as a valuable and productive *Kulturnation*. Certainly nationalizing imperialists routinely portrayed Poles as barbarians to justify their agenda of German aggrandizement. But very often their policies were premised on the implicit recognition that Poles were capable of sophisticated political action. Telling is the contrast between plans for Poland and the Baltic littoral. While most Germans agreed that Baltic cultures exhibited a relatively low degree of development or political cohesion, few nationalizing imperialists suggested expelling natives from annexed Baltic territory. Ethnic cleansing was conceived of as an instrument to purge a region of a population which was considered both inherently hostile and capable of threatening German hegemony. Only a few nationalizing imperialists supported this measure early in the war, and they reserved it for securing German control over annexations in Congress Poland.

The legacy of Prussian policies towards its Polish-speaking minority in the *Ostmark* also had a far more complicated influence on German imperialism in WWI than is generally assumed. By 1914 decades of Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik* had discredited linguistic Germanization as a

strategy to assimilate Polish populations. However, German imperialists disagreed on the implications of this lesson. For those who considered national homogeneity indispensible for imperial unity, the failure of integral nationalism demanded more coercive policies of homogenization. But the ongoing failure of Prussian Germanization policies spurred others to question the wisdom of homogenization, and explore the possibility of German-Polish reconciliation. Prussian *Ostmarkenpolitik* bequeathed a fundamental and ongoing debate over the objectives and means of Germanization to German imperialists in WWI.

In the early years of the war, a growing number of German intellectuals, publicists, and policy-makers endorsed the creation of an autonomous Polish state in multinational union with the German Empire because they firmly believed that this represented the best available option for achieving Germany's strategic objectives in the region. Alternative proposals seemed comparatively worse. A purely independent and sovereign Polish state risked that Warsaw would adopt an anti-German policy or even align itself with one of Germany's international rivals to secure its claims to the Prussian *Ostmark*. While proposals for an Austro-Polish solution initially garnered more sympathy, Germans increasingly suspected that Polish nationalists might seize effective control over Vienna's foreign policy and gradually turn the Austro-Hungarian Empire against Germany. At the same time, German observers were skeptical that the militarily weak and constitutionally dysfunctional Austro-Hungarian Empire could defend Congress Poland in a future war with Russia. Nationalizing models of ethnic management promised permanent control of annexed territory, but many observers worried that this strategy would only produce a disgruntled and hostile Polish minority in the region, equipping Russia with an enthusiastic fifth column in the event of a future military conflict. Proposals for the creation of a Polish state under German suzerainty, by contrast, promised vast strategic gains without provoking Polish national ire. So long as German imperialists believed that Poles would accept multinational union as legitimate, multinational imperialism appeared to offer the most strategically advantageous model of expansion. The credibility of multinational imperialism, therefore, functioned as a high barrier to the adoption of nationalizing imperial models.

From August 1914 through November 1916, multinationalist intellectuals and publicists articulated an increasingly vehement case for the creation of an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty. Nationalizing imperialists consistently cautioned against these policies, warning that Poles could not be trusted to serve German interests. However, even the publications of the *Ostmarkenverein* tacitly acknowledged the increasing persuasiveness and influence of multinationalist arguments. A growing number of imperial policy-makers were certainly convinced. Whether swayed by the articles and memoranda of multinationalist writers, or persuaded by their own analysis of the political climate in Congress Poland, influential civilians leaders and military commanders of the German Empire came to support the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland under German suzerainty. By 1916, broad segments of the German public and imperial leadership believed that Polish national identity was compatible with loyalty to the German Empire and that the institutionalization of Polish nationhood in an autonomous and militarily capable Kingdom of Poland represented the best means of achieving German strategic security in Eastern Europe. By the summer, German policy-makers had reached a broad consensus in support of a German-Polish union. The leadership of the Imperial Chancellery, RAI, Foreign Office, German Army, and the GGW were all fundamentally united in their support for this imperial vision. Only the Prussian Interior Ministry, specifically Minister von Loebell, offered determined resistance. On 5 November 1916, the German Empire therefore established the Kingdom of Poland as the first step in building a German-Polish union.

Acknowledging the broad appeal of multinational imperialism in German political culture illuminates how European states attempted to manage ethnic and cultural diversity in the early twentieth century. Debates in the German Empire over how to manage the population of Congress Poland show that policy-makers carefully considered how national identity produced political claims. Whether German observers understood political loyalty as a transaction or an embedded trait dramatically impacted their receptivity to multinationalist proposals. So to did their understanding of the role of socio-political hierarchy within nations. Policy-makers and intellectuals who believed that social, intellectual, and political elites wielded significant

influence over the narratives, mores, and political cultures of the nations, also saw clear routes by which the German Empire could manipulate and reshape Polish nationalism to its own ends. Conversely, those who believed that the content of Polish nationalism was more or less demotic, that a diffuse popular opinion or general will established the basic parameters of nationalist discourse, were more likely to perceive Poland as practically immune to Berlin's influence. A prevailing leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism greatly contributed to German confidence in multinational imperialism early in the war.

Berlin's efforts to establish a German-Polish union suggest a broader reevaluation of how European states confronted the challenges of modern administration and political mobilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jörn Leonhard has argued that the leadership of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires increasingly looked to nation-states as models for administrative rationalization.[2] In the latter half of the nineteenth century, each of these empires attempted to reinforce their fiscal and military resources by emulating the intensive centralization apparent in Nation-states. In the process they abandoned traditional methods of negotiating with and balancing constituent ethnic groups.[3] New railways and telegraphs, political centralization, and universal conscription were all introduced to fortify the power of the metropole at the expense of peripheral interests.[4] However, Leonhard notes that many of these reforms unintentionally facilitated, or even provoked, resistance from local populations. Telegraph lines hung by St. Petersburg to improve official communications were used to organize revolutionaries in Ukraine in 1905.[5] The Ottoman Empire's introduction of universal conscription in 1909 sparked revolts in Arabia and Albania.[6] Leonhard argues that Europe's large empires increasingly blamed this resistance on ethnic heterogeneity, and therefore began to understand national homogenization as a necessary ingredient in modernization.[7] Leonhard is one of several prominent scholars who have suggested that European states predominantly favored policies of national homogenization in the early twentieth century.[8]

German multinational imperialism demonstrates that European political elites were at least exploring alternative methods to confront the interrelated challenges of ethnic diversity and political modernity. German intellectuals and policy-makers did not espouse multinationalism in an effort to ignore the realities of modern political mobilization and nationalist claims. Rather, they considered the devolution of authority for cultural policies and local administration to autonomous states an effective strategy reconciling modern national claims with imperial expansion. Germans' proposals for federalist multinationalism represented a revised and rationalized version of the traditional strategy of negotiating central authority diverse local elites and populations. By 1914, therefore, German intellectuals had not abandoned the idea of empire. They instead attempted to modernize it. For Germany, WWI was not a process of radicalization, but a moment of experimentation.

But repeated frustrations killed German confidence in multinational imperialism. After 1916 Germans were haunted by the fear that Polish national identity might just be incompatible with German imperial integrity. In the two years following the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland, the German occupation government experienced repeated setbacks in its efforts to establish a Polish protectorate. Expecting a flood of Polish volunteers willing to fight alongside Germany for their new country, the GGW instead received a trickle. In July 1917, the Polish

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[2] Jörn Leonhard, "Imperial Projections and Piecemeal Realities: Multiethic Empires and the Experience of Failure in the Nineteenth Century," in *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, ed. Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Rupprecht GmbH & co., 2013), 23.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 24.
[5] Ibid., 26.
[6] Ibid., 40.
[7] Ibid., 46.
[8] See also Eric Weitz, "From Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008); Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Philipp Ther, "Pre-Negotiated Violence: Ethnic Cleansing in the 'Long' First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014).

army's mutiny and the resulting Oath Crisis reinforced doubts about Polish trustworthiness, and renewed fears that Germany might be forging the instrument of its own destruction by equipping and training a Polish national army. The GGW's effort to restore their popular credibility through the creation of a Regency Council only produced new conflicts when the occupation found it difficult to build a political coalition that could be depended upon to back a German-Polish solution. The effects of these major frictions were only amplified by the local strikes, demonstrations, and clashes between civilians and occupation authorities which ground away the trust and patience of occupation officials.

The experiences of occupying Poland produced two fundamental shifts in how German policy-makers and observers understood Polish nationalism. First, Germans began to abandon a leadership-oriented sociology of nationalism. From 1916-1918 German occupation officials and policy-makers in Berlin found it increasingly difficult to build a coalition of Polish notables who would reliably advance the cause of a German-Polish union. German policy-makers lamented on many occasions that intransigent Polish elites seemed determined to delay, divert, or sabotage multinational union. Those few elites who continued to support the multinationalist project seemed utterly without influence in Poland. German policy-makers worried that either the national elite of Poland could not be persuaded to accept German suzerainty, or that they could not actually shape Polish national sentiment to any significant extent. Neither conclusion inspired faith in the long-term integrity of a German-Polish union. Polish nationalism appeared both demotic and impermeable to German influence. This reinforced a second fundamental shift in attitudes toward ethnic management, in which German imperialists began to abandon the idea that political loyalty was a basically transactional phenomenon. Instead intellectuals and policy-makers began to more rigidly equate political loyalty with national identity.

Repeated frustrations in occupied Poland sowed doubt in Berlin, and within the German public more broadly, as to whether Poles would actually accept suzerainty as legitimate and beneficial. The Polish state, which German observers had hoped would secure Polish support for a mutually protective German-Polish union, increasingly seemed worthless, burdensome, or even dangerous. Familiar suspicions returned. German intellectuals and policy-makers again suspected that Warsaw would refuse to defend the German-Polish union in the event of war. They worried that it would act as the "Serbia of the North", and support efforts by nationalist agents and agitators to subvert Prussian rule in the *Ostmark*. They feared that the Polish military would intervene to aid a nationalist revolt in Prussia, or that Warsaw might even decide to strike to claim these *irredenta*. Their perennial nightmare was that Poland would coordinate with foreign rivals to betray its German suzerain. As relations soured in the final years of the war, Germans therefore ceased to regard the Polish nation as a potentially valuable strategic asset for the German Empire, and instead began to perceive Poland as a menacing and capable challenger to German hegemony and security in Eastern Europe.

German intellectuals and policy-makers responded by advocating a panoply of new policies to compel Polish loyalty or defend the German Empire in the event of Warsaw's betrayal. New qualifications and conditions corrupted proposals for a German-Polish union, producing a monstrous amalgam of a multinationalist framework and repressive guarantees. Many Germans favored using threats and force of arms to ensure the continued compliance of the Polish state. Particularly popular among policy-makers in 1918 was the idea of permanently empowering the Kaiser to garrison German troops in fortresses throughout the Kingdom of Poland. Military and civilian leaders also discussed reducing the strategic resources of Poland, at least temporarily. Even ardent multinationalists like Beseler favored delaying the training of a large Polish army until Berlin could be confident that it would not be deployed against the German Empire. Support for the creation of a large and powerful Polish state, encompassing parts of White Ruthenia and Lithuania, crumbled. Policy-makers also discussed measures to balance Poland in the event of Warsaw's defection, and to contain its influence in Eastern Europe. Ludendorff and Hindenburg found growing support for their plans to annex territory to the east of Poland, both to sever the kingdom from Russian military support, and to surround the state on three fronts. Discussions in Berlin over Baltic policy also focused on quarantining the region from Polish social and political influence. Finally, German military and civilian leaders

planned to directly fortify the territory of the German Empire from Polish attack. Berlin drafted plans for annexing a larger strips of territory along the Polish border, including along Poland's western frontier. German policy-makers also seriously discussed guaranteeing Berlin's permanent control of these annexations through more aggressive policies of Germanization.

It is important to note here that Berlin remained committed to a fundamentally multinationalist policy until the end of the war. Through the summer of 1918, the German Empire continued to support the creation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland and its incorporation into a permanent military and political union with the German Empire. German policy-makers delayed and qualified, but did not abandon, plans for a Polish national army, nor did they contemplate restricting the scope of Warsaw's jurisdiction over education, domestic administration, cultural policy, or police powers. This testifies to the deep reservoir of support for multinationalist imperialism, present in both the German imperial government as well as in the political parties of the Reichstag. By 1918, German policy-makers still hoped that a German-Polish union would yield greater strategic gains at a lower cost, than the alternative imperial models. However, their growing doubts about the reliability of Poland had led them to bastardize the program of multinational union articulated in the fall of 1916.

Postwar Interpretations of the Occupation of Congress Poland

The loss of the war, the collapse of the occupation, and the subsequent dismemberment of the German Empire smashed what remained of multinational imperialism's credibility. As noted in chapter 6, contemporary German observers interpreted the collapse of the GGW in November 1918 as confirmation that the elites and masses of Poland had never genuinely intended to cooperate with the German Empire, and had instead long plotted their betrayal. From 1918-1921, as simmering paramilitary conflicts and international settlements carved away German territory and awarded it to the emerging Polish republic, nationalizing imperialists claimed that their warnings over Polish treachery had been vindicated, and that German imperial interests and Polish national interests were indeed incompatible. Germany's loss of much of the Prussian *Ostmark* also reframed multinationalism from a failed strategy for extending influence, into a counterproductive adventure which had exposed the German Empire to disaster.

As revolution flared in Germany in November 1918, Endek politicians had organized national revolutionary councils throughout Posen.[9] In an effort to establish de facto Polish rule over disputed Prussian territory before peace negotiations, Polish nationalist leaders had launched an armed rebellion in Posen on 27 December, supported by units of the POW.[10] Many Polish veterans of the Prussian army also contributed to the secession effort.[11] Over weeks of fighting they gradually dislodged Posen from Berlin's control. Militarily exhausted, financially destitute, plagued by revolution, and suffering from severe supply problems, the German government responded by directing *Freikorps*, local militias, and other paramilitaries to defend German territory from Polish secession.[12] After prolonged fighting in the region, the armistice commission awarded much of Posen and West Prussia to Poland in 1919. This did not settle the matter. The initial Posen uprising was followed by a series of Polish rebellions in Upper Silesia from 1920-1921, involving bloody fighting, and increasingly acrimonious rhetoric.[13]

The gradual loss of Prussian territory following the war reinforced claims by nationalizing imperialists that demographic reengineering was essential for holding territory. Nationalist critics argued that Poles would not have been able to seize Prussian territory, and the allies would not have been able to justify its partition, if the *Ostmark* had been more densely settled with ethnic Germans. Already in 1919, President Friedrich Ebert attempted to rectify this vulnerability by appointing Max Sering to draft a new German Reich Settlement Law. Inner

[9] Martin Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich: Ehrenwirth, 1963), 154.
[10] Ibid., 155.
[11] Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* CXXVI, no. 522 (2011): 1165.
[12] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 155.
[13] Ibid.; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 56.

colonization would once again aim to prevent subsequent annexations.[14]

Following two years of a contentious and frustrating occupation, and the subsequent collapse of Germany's strategic position in Eastern Europe, Weimar political culture developed an intensely negative assessment of the GGW's occupation policy in Congress Poland. Memories of the occupation catalyzed multinational imperialism's loss of credibility. From the occupation Germans learned to regard Polish nationalism, and indeed national diversity in general, as incompatible with German imperial strength and security. They concluded that the occupation of Congress Poland had vindicated the concerns of nationalizing imperialists that multinational imperialism had been a doomed policy, and that building a Polish state had only empowered hostile Polish nationalists to challenge the German Empire.

A number of imperial authorities and even former officials of the GGW wrote their own analyses of the occupation after the war. Even the most staid of these accounts were deeply conflicted about the wisdom of multinationalist policy. Paul Roth, a former official in the GGW press department, published *Die politische Entwicklung in Kongresspolen während der deutschen Okkupation* in 1919 as a defense of the occupation's decisions during the war. It later became a semi-official history of the occupation, recommended by the agency tasked with winding up and dissolving the GGW.[15] Roth expressed deep ambiguity about this "gloomy chapter" of the war. On the one hand he blamed Germany for committing serious and avoidable errors during the war, which had severely undermined the GGW's efforts to build trust with the population of Congress Poland. He likewise identified the heavy burden of wartime requisitions as a significant factor in generating Polish hostility to the GGW.[16] Soldiers and occupation officials in Congress Poland, Roth argued, had sometimes alienated the occupied population by affecting an attitude of arrogant superiority.[17] Finally, Roth blamed the German government for failing to quickly produce credible institutions of Polish statehood after November 1916.[18] Throughout his analysis, Roth insisted that Polish nationalist opposition to the German Empire represented a understandable reaction to policy failures, and not the product of an essential or quasi-racial Polish antipathy to Germany.[19] Despite Germany's myriad errors during the war, Roth noted that the Polish population had "endured the burdens of the occupation-period with patience" and had never threatened "serious revolt" until the end of the war.[20]

But latent doubts about the trustworthiness of Polish nationalists suffused Roth's work.[21] Given Poles' antipathy for the German Empire before the war, Roth recognized that multinationalist policy had been a "great gamble".[22] He also emphasized that National Democracy, with its fantasies of annexing Prussian territory, had already secured a dominant position in Polish politics before the war, and had fortified hostility towards the German Empire.[23] Though he recognized the negative impact of Prussian policies, Roth also argued that Polish hatred for Germany stemmed from their own pervasive sense of inferiority to Germans in terms of "diligence, tenacity, training, and discipline".[24] He claimed, therefore, that "antipathy against the Germans was a universal, and deeply-rooted" sentiment in Congress Poland.[25] Roth suspected that Poles had plotted against Germany during the occupation and emphasized the

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[14] Robert L Nelson, "The Archive for Inner Colonization, the German East, and World War I," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 Through the Present*, ed. Robert L Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 85–86.
[15] Stab des GGWs, "Kurzer historischer Überblick über das Generalgouvernement Warschau (mit Organisationsplan und Aktenverzeichnis) vom Dez. 1914 bis Nov. 1918," 1923, 45, PH30-II/62, BArch.
[16] Paul Roth, *Die politische entwicklung in Kongresspolen während der deutschen Okkupation* (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1919), 31.
[17] Ibid., 33–34.
[18] Ibid., 47.
[19] Ibid., 184–85.
[20] Ibid., 36.
[21] Ibid., 5.
[22] Ibid., 11.
[23] Ibid., 9–10.
[24] Ibid., 10.
[25] Ibid., 11.

POW had never ceased their covert pursuit of independence.[26] When the GGW did collapse, Roth argued that the Polish coup's "systematic approach evinced careful preparation".[27]

If Roth believed that a victorious Germany might have secured temporary influence over a friendly Polish state, he still doubted that Berlin could have achieved the lasting and constitutionally regulated suzerainty that it had planned in 1916. Even the minority of Polish political elites who had wanted to join the Central Powers' war effort, Roth argued, had generally made it clear that they did not want to accept any "territorial an constitutional constriction of the Polish state" as a condition.[28] He suggested that German-Polish relations had deteriorated during the war at least in part because the "harmony of political goals between the occupying powers and the Polish [political] circles could only ever be temporary".[29] Polish political factions, Roth claimed, had pursued fundamentally "simple and clear" objectives during the war: they "strove for a greater and free Poland".[30] Any Polish elites sympathetic to German plans, Roth noted, had the unenviable task of convincing a "nation [*Volk*] of strong national feeling" of the "necessity of abandoning" their goals for practical reasons.[31] Polish nationalist objectives, he believed, were essentially incompatible in the long term with German interests. Ultimately, Roth doubted that the grand bargain at the foundation of the "German-Polish" solution could have actually won the lasting support of the Polish civilian population.[32]

Lieutenant Colonel Helfritz offered similarly equivocal portrayal of the occupation after the war. Helfritz had served as an *Oberquartiermeister* on the military staff of the GGW, and had chaired the occupation's Regional Studies Commission. In 1922 he sketched out his own thoughts on the occupation.[33] Helfritz emphasized that Beseler had faced several "technical obstacles" to the implementation of his policies.[34] Some, like the administrative partition of Congress Poland, were avoidable errors. But Helfritz also argued that Poles' "tremendous political fractiousness", their "unreliability", and their "aversion to everything German" had made it extremely difficult for the GGW to negotiate a stable political settlement with Poland.[35]

Other former members of the occupation publicly decried multinationalist policy as an unmitigated disaster. This process was already well advanced during the war, as the former Chief of Administration for the GGW, Wolfgang von Kries, had criticized German policy from the halls of the Prussian parliament. Georg Cleinow, the former chief of the GGW press department had, of course, venomously inveighed against multinationalist policy as an invitation for disaster. After the war, they were joined by Ernst von Glasenapp, the Police-President of Warsaw. Glasenapp had supported efforts to forge a German-Polish union until the end of the war, but in light of his own doubts about Polish reliability, he had famously recommended that Berlin continue occupying strategic Polish territories until Warsaw's loyalty could be confirmed. Following the war, Glasenapp condemned German policy in Poland, arguing that its weakness had only encouraged Poles to entertain and pursue their insatiable nationalist demands.[36]

Ludendorff offered the most prominent indictment of multinationalist imperial policy in Poland. As noted above, Ludendorff had not only supported Beseler's efforts to form a German-Polish union, he had in fact been an early proponent of establishing a Polish state under German suzerainty. Ludendorff and Beseler had, of course, espoused different visions of Polish

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[26] Ibid., 36, 54.
[27] Ibid., 128.
[28] Ibid., 40.
[29] Ibid., 53.
[30] Ibid., 182.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 187.
[33] Helfritz, "Aufzeichnung von Helfritz für eine spätere historische Darstellung über die politische Tätigkeit des Generals von Beseler als Generalgouverneur in Warschau, 1915-1918," 1922, N30/4, BArch. Helfritz's chronicle is an unfinished draft. In reality, it is more of an outline. The document focuses primarily on the early phases of the occupation. It is unclear how Helfritz intended to expand the work, if at all.
[34] Ibid., 2.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 215.

statehood, and Ludendorff had never been enthusiastic about expanding Poland eastward. Nonetheless, Ludendorff had supported a multinationalist policy in Poland. But in his memoires, penned in exile between November 1918 and February 1919, Ludendorff mendaciously acquitted himself of any responsibility for what he regarded as a disastrous imperial policy in Poland. Throughout the two-volume work, Ludendorff vehemently denied the 'rumors' that he had exercised any influence in crafting multinationalist policy.[37] He claimed that he had only been informed of plans to establish the Kingdom of Poland after his promotion to Quartermaster-General.[38] He also insisted that he had only 'sanctioned' the plan because of Germany's urgent need for a Polish soldiers.[39] He made sure to blame Beseler alone for misjudging the willingness of Poles to enlist in the army.[40] Ludendorff also claimed that he had withdrawn his support from the multinationalist project as soon as the failure of Polish recruitment had become apparent in December 1916. Indeed he suggested that plans to form a Polish army had "ended for good" in late 1916.[41] All of these claims were either misleading or false.

After minimizing his role as an early proponent of multinational union, Ludendorff launched a broadside against multinationalist policy. Ludendorff argued that Poles' intrinsic hostility to the German Empire had doomed multinational imperialism to failure. He described the "strong national sentiment of the Poles and the traditional hostility between Poles and Germans" as practically indissoluble.[42] The creation of an autonomous Polish state, he concluded, could never have mitigated this basic hostility, or diverted Polish ambitions away from Prussian territory.[43] The Polish nation, he wrote, had represented an inherent threat to both German hegemony in Eastern Europe and to the German Empire itself. Indeed, Ludendorff referred to the looming threat of "Polish domination" to justify his 'civilizing' policies in Ober Ost.[44] Polish nationalists, he warned, had aimed to incorporate Lithuania into the Polish state. Ludendorff could not permit the formation of a Lithuanian state during the war, he explained, because such a state would have invariably become a Polish satellite.

> Any prince at Vilna would have had the Polish nobility at his court, the officers of the army would have been Poles, and so would the majority of the civil officials. Only Prussia-Germany could keep Lithuania for the Lithuanians, and provide officials and officers, which they themselves could not do in any sufficient numbers.[45]

Ludendorff therefore persisted in describing Poland as a sophisticated nation. The restoration of Polish statehood, he believed, threatened to create a new rival for German hegemony in Eastern Europe. He wrote that he had acted so urgently against Polish influence in the Baltics because if Warsaw controlled Lithuania than "Poland would surround East and West Prussia", a situation which would have been "incompatible with the security of Germany".[46]

Ludendorff insisted that the creation of a Kingdom of Poland had only undermined German security and empowered a bitterly hostile nation to more effectively subvert German interests. "In view of the ambiguous attitude of Poland" Ludendorff wrote after the war, "any arming of that country presented dangers which it was our duty to avoid…".[47] To train and equip

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[37] Erich Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), 474. This is one of Ludendorff's most lasting career achievements. Most historians continue to accept his fundamental aversion to Beseler's policies to this day.
[38] Ibid., 1:470.
[39] Ibid., 1:469–70.
[40] Ibid., 1:472.
[41] Ibid., 1:474.
[42] Ibid., 1:475.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 1:21.
[45] Erich Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), 156.
[46] Ibid., 2:80.
[47] Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 1:474–75.

a Polish army, he concluded, had endangered the German Empire because Poland had preferred "to achieve her ends against Germany" and "with the aid of the Entente".[48]

In lieu of a German-Polish union, Ludendorff argued that the German Empire should have sought the annexation of a "protective belt" of Polish territory to fortify its vulnerable eastern border.[49] The rest of the territory should have been bargained to Russia for a separate peace.[50] Ludendorff did not, in the pages of his memoire, suggest that the German Empire should have purged these annexations of their resident Poles, or propose that extensive ethnic German colonization might have been used to secure the territory. He had advocated both measures during the war, but apparently considered it inappropriate to publicize these views. He wrote only that a Polish population would be an "undesirable" presence in a border-strip.[51]

Ludendorff blamed the civilian leadership of the German Empire for continuing to pursue multinationalist union with Poland even after Warsaw's unreliability had become obvious. Civilian authorities, he argued, had blocked the adoption of an imperial policy at Brest-Litovsk which would have both secured Germany's interests and finally "removed the danger threatening from Poland".[52] Ludendorff singled out Chancellor Hertling and State Secretary Kühlmann for failing to seize a border-strip and instead jeopardizing German security through the confirmation of Polish statehood.[53] Indeed, he considered civilian authorities' reluctance to apply rote military force, and their unfathomable focus on "reconciliation and understanding" to be the basic flaw of the German war effort. Ludendorff therefore integrated the failure of Germany's multinationalist policy in Poland into the structuring theme of his memoire: his assertion that German strength demanded absolute political unity guaranteed by ethnic homogeneity.[54]

Ludendorff remained a central figure in the German nationalist pantheon after the war. His assessments of the war and German occupation policy carried real weight. His memoires became tremendously influential, and were even included on lists of recommended reading for officer trainees in the Reichswehr.[55] Indeed, anti-Polish sentiment became particularly pronounced in military circles after the war. During the war, Hans von Seeckt had opposed the creation of an autonomous Polish state as a reckless endeavor more likely to endanger than fortify German security. When he was promoted to the Chief of Army Command for the Reichswehr in 1920, Seeckt brought his disdain for Poland into the highest echelons of the German army. In 1922 he wrote boldly to Foreign Minister Brockdorff-Rantzau that "Poland's existence is intolerable and incompatible with the Germany's conditions for life". Poland, he insisted "must disappear, and will disappear through its own weakness and by Russia, with German assistance".[56]

Nationalizing imperialists cultivated a negative memory of Germany's wartime occupation policy, often smugly interpreting the collapse of the occupation and subsequent strife along Germany's eastern border as vindication of their earlier warnings against trusting Poles. In May 1919 Fritz Vosberg, a long time leader of the *Ostmarkenverein*, published a long examination of German and Prussian Polish policies over the centuries. He central thesis was that German efforts to reconcile with Poles had historically only encouraged Polish nationalists' demand greater concessions from Berlin. "Every period of so-called reconciliation-policy", Vosberg insisted, had only signaled Berlin's weakness to its Polish population, and led to an "increase in the nationalist aspirations of the Poles" and their desire for secession from Prussia.[57]

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[48] Ibid., 1:475.
[49] Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 2:139.
[50] Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 1:476; Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 2:187.
[51] Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 2:140.
[52] Ibid., 2:167.
[53] Ibid., 2:169–73.
[54] Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914-November 1918*, 1919, 1:2.
[55] Stab des GGWs, "Kurzer historischer Überblick über das Generalgouvernement Warschau (mit Organisationsplan und Aktenverzeichnis) vom Dez. 1914 bis Nov. 1918," 45.
[56] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 169.
[57] Fritz Vosberg, *Der polnische Aufstand in seiner Entstehung: die Vorbereitungen zum polnischen Aufstande in der Provinz Posen im November-Dezember, 1918* (Berlin: Preussische Verlagsanstalt, 1919), 7.

Vosberg portrayed Germany's efforts to forge a multinational union with Poland during the war as the culmination of this pattern, a powerful "reinforcement of Polish nationalist and irredentist aspirations".[58] Vosberg insisted that Polish nationalists would never reconcile with Berlin until Germany had surrendered all of the Prussian territories claimed as Polish irredenta.[59] The formation of the Polish state on 5 November, he claimed, had done nothing to win the gratitude or cooperation of Poles.[60] It had only created an institutional base of support for Polish resistance, a "spine of the national Polish movement".[61] Polish nationalists, Vosberg believed, had exploited Germany's generous occupation policy to develop its own military strength for a future struggle with the German Empire.[62] In retrospect, he argued, only extensive ethnic German colonization could have secured reliable German control over Polish space.[63]

Vosberg blamed Germany's permissive occupation policy for facilitating the recent Polish revolt in Posen.[64] The armed revolt, he believed, had been planned for months.[65] Vosberg hinted that the rebels might be aided by paramilitary organizations across the border in Poland.[66] He even suggested that Warsaw was covertly supporting the secessionist movement in Prussia.[67] He inveighed against the Polish state for encouraging secessionism by inviting representatives from Posen to assist in building the new national government.[68] For Poland's first parliamentary elections in January 1919, Warsaw had established electoral districts to represent territories claimed by Poland across the Prussian Ostmark. Vosberg regarded this as a provocative betrayal of the German Empire and he argued that this formal enumeration of Polish claims had spurred paramilitary activity in the *Ostmark* and hastened the disintegration of German control.[69]

Vosberg's polemic against German "reconciliation policy" reached four conclusions about multinationalist policy. First, he argued that Germany's offer of autonomous statehood had done nothing to earn the gratitude or loyalty of the Polish population. Second, he believed that this policy had diverted German efforts from more effective and reliable means of securing control over Polish territory. Third, he contended that Poles had interpreted Berlin's generosity as a sign of weakness. Finally, Vosberg argued that the creation of a Polish state had created an institutional base of support for the Polish nation's continued struggle against German rule. "The assumption of the Flottwell-Bismarck-Bülow policy [Germanization] was the untrustworthiness [*Unzuverlässigkeit*] of the Polish population", Vosberg wrote in 1919. "It was tested through the war" and, he continued "unfortunately it was – as the facts demonstrate", confirmed.[70]

In the chaotic years after 1918, therefore, German writers developed a particular memory of the German occupation of Congress Poland which discredited multinational imperialism. German observers concluded that multinational imperialism had been a futile project, that Poles had never been genuinely willing to collaborate with the German Empire, and that efforts to establish an autonomous Polish state had only equipped Poles for more effective resistance against the German Empire. They believed that Germany had accidentally created a well-armed and hostile state which could appeal to predatory international rivals to intervene on their behalf against Berlin. Nationalist critics blamed efforts to establish a German-Polish union for Germany's weak position in Eastern Europe and subsequent losses in the *Ostmark*. Postwar apologists for the GGW tried to indicate the complexity of the situation, but their defenses were often equivocal. They too wondered if the Polish population would have ever accepted German leadership as legitimate. Plagued by severe doubts over its ability to achieve long-term stability,

[58] Ibid., 115.
[59] Ibid., 8.
[60] Ibid., 9–11, 69.
[61] Ibid., 10.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 9.
[64] Ibid., 19.
[65] Ibid., 88–89, 114.
[66] Ibid., 21.
[67] Ibid., 11.
[68] Ibid., 22.
[69] Ibid., 71.
[70] Ibid., 7.

multinational imperialism ceased to be widely regarded as a viable means of ethnic management and imperial expansion. The failure to create a Polish state under German suzerainty discredited the idea that foreign nations could be trusted to defend and cooperate with German imperial authority and recast cultural diversity, and Polish national identity in particular, as incompatible with the strength and integrity of the German imperial state.

The Acceptance of Barbarism as the Basis of Imperial Security

German imperialists remained fundamentally interested in seizing Polish territory after WWI. The goal of reclaiming the territory lost to Poland after 1918 remained a constant axiom of Weimar politics.[71] German army commanders and civilian observers regarded Poland as an urgent strategic threat to Germany. After Warsaw concluded an alliance with France in 1921, German officers learned to despise Poland as the "gendarme of France" and the latest instance of Germany's encirclement.[72] Poland maintained an army much larger and better equipped than the tiny and legally restricted *Reichswehr*, and German military leaders warned that almost the entire Polish population was "trained in weapons proficiency and prepared for war".[73] German observers also continued to regard Germany's eastern frontier as strategically indefensible. Poland's Pomeranian Vovoidship (formerly West Prussia) effectively cut off East Prussia from the rest of Germany, making the former practically impossible to hold in the event of war. German commanders feared Poland might attempt to expand its territory. They were alarmed by the claims of some Polish nationalist groups to territory in East Prussia or Silesia. *Reichswehr* analysts warned that the series of forts built along Poland's western frontier could function as a "sally port" for Polish attacks on "Berlin and East Prussia".[74] With a much larger and better-equipped army, support from their French ally, and commanding an advantageous position, they feared that Poland would be able to easily take these objectives in any contest with Germany. Reinforcing Germany's eastern frontier through the seizure of Polish territory therefore remained a latent ambition among German commanders after WWI.

However, memories of the occupation of Congress Poland had severely depleted the German imperial toolbox. After 1918, German imperialists believed they had very few credible options for achieving stable control over captured territories. During WWI, nationalizing imperialists had already recommended autocratic rule, colonization, and ethnic cleansing as methods of imposing German rule. Military commanders and civilian authorities had seriously considered these proposals. But as long as the assumptions of multinational imperialism had appeared credible, plans for a German-Polish union had presented a very attractive alternative to the brutality of coercive Germanization. Multinational imperialism had thus served as a high barrier to nationalizing imperialism. But when Germany attempted to expand into ethnically diverse space after 1918, imperialists no longer saw any viable alternative to homogenization. The demise of multinationalism allowed the most diabolic instincts of imperialism to flourish. When Nazi Germany launched its war of expansion in 1939, German imperialists broadly agreed that Germanization and ethnic cleansing were the only sure ways to secure Germany's lasting control over space.

Of course, the Nazi imperial project cannot be understood divorced from its firm ideological foundations in apocalyptic racism and anti-Semitism. However, racial ideology alone is insufficient to explain the strategic choices of Nazi policy-makers in constructing a Greater-German Empire in Europe. Nazi leadership acted upon an uncompromising ideological commitment to anti-Semitism, and consistently aimed to rid the German Reich, and later Europe, of its Jewish population.[75] However, Nazi policies towards Slavic populations were much less consistent. Berlin calibrated its policies towards Slavic states and populations according to

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[71] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 165–67.
[72] Ibid., 167, 184-185.; Major Marcks, "„Die militärische Bedrohung Deutschlands durch Polen"," April 24, 1931, RW6/100, BArch.
[73] Major Marcks, "„Die militärische Bedrohung Deutschlands durch Polen"."
[74] Ibid.
[75] John Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1999): 3, 28, 32–33.

strategic priorities rather than racial imperatives. While large swathes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were slated for depopulation, extermination, and helotry, other region's experienced less brutal forms of German influence.[76] Bulgaria was deemed more useful as an ally than as an enemy of the Nazi Empire.[77] Czechs, though subject to German rule, experienced a relatively evenhanded occupation in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.[78] Nazi policies of ethnic management towards particular national groups also changed according to evolving strategic conditions. Ukrainians in the USSR were subjected to uncompromising violence under German rule. But across the border in occupied Poland German authorities hoped to play the Ukrainians of Galicia against Poles, and therefore tolerated the organization of limited Ukrainian cultural institutions.[79]

Accepting the brutal methods of Nazi imperialism also did not require subscription to the racial ideology of National Socialism. The Nazi regime depended upon the cooperation of German bureaucrats, army officers, and other political elites to realize its violent imperial vision. Such actors were not always convinced of National Socialist ideology, and some famously disdained the politics and personalities of the regime. However, the radical visions of imperial organization and ethnic management adopted during WWII encountered remarkably little principled resistance from military or civilian quarters of the government. During the war, an extra-ideological consensus in favor of nationalizing policies of ethnic management prevailed among German imperial planners.

During WWII, Berlin also wielded homogenization and ethnic cleansing as a tool to secure territory even when Nazi ideologues did not imagine that they were ridding the space of Bolsheviks or racially inferior sub-humans. Alsace and Lorraine, were reincorporated into the Reich after the defeat of France in 1940. As Germany's new western frontier, imperial planners wanted to ensure that no foreign identities would split the loyalties of the region's residents. Alsace and Lorraine were therefore subjected to severe policies of linguistic Germanization and ethnic cleansing. Gauleiter Josef Bürckel expelled 60,000 French speakers from Lorraine and proposed deporting another 40,000 as settlers to Ukraine.[80]

Nazi imperialism, though structured around a pervasive racist ideology, therefore still approached questions of ethnic management according to primarily strategic considerations. In regions that were either strategically valuable or slated for eventual incorporation into the new Reich, imperial planners prioritized the consolidation of durable German control when selecting their strategies of ethnic management. As multinational imperialism had lost credibility, Nazi ideologues, military commanders, and other political elites broadly agreed that comprehensive ethnic homogenization represented the only effective guarantee for imperial integrity and security. Even when there were compelling reasons for German imperialists to encourage the collaboration of native populations with Berlin, the extension of political autonomy under German suzerainty was never seriously considered for regions of significant strategic value.

Nazi Germany's rule over Czech territory did not break this pattern. Germany refrained from directly annexing the Czech state in 1938 and instead reorganized it into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This Protectorate provided for a degree of Czech self-governance.[81] Czech's were allowed their own President and executive, as well as a native administration.[82] However, Berlin rigorously limited and controlled the Czech government. A *Reichsprotektor* appointed by Berlin functioned as a viceroy, and disposed of his own civil administration, military, and police forces. With no constitutional limits to his authority, the *Reichsprotektor* was free to intervene in Czech affairs as he saw fit.[83] Aside from a small militia, the Protectorate was not permitted to establish any Czech national army. It was not expected to contribute to the

[76] Ibid., 6–7.
[77] Ibid., 4.
[78] Ibid., 5.
[79] Ibid., 7–8.
[80] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 201.
[81] Ibid., 60.
[82] Ibid., 59.
[83] Ibid., 59–60.

military strength of the Reich, nor would it possess any effective guarantee for its autonomy.

In 1938 Berlin hoped a relatively benevolent occupation policy would maintain peace with the western powers. Just as importantly, Germany needed the massive Skoda armament works to contribute to its ongoing rearmament program, and could not afford labor dislocations or work stoppages that expulsions or Germanization might cause.[84] When war broke out in 1939, the opinion of western powers no longer constrained German policies of ethnic management in the protectorate. Nazi officials closed Czech universities and arrested intellectuals en masse in Prague.[85] After the defeat of France in 1940, Nazi officials began drafting new plans to expunge Czech national culture from the Protectorate by expelling or killing roughly half of the native population, and coercively Germanizing the remainder.[86] The continued need for Czech workers to man the lines of the Skoda armaments works spared the Protectorate from these measures.[87]

Nazi Germany's conquest and subjugation of Poland in 1939 reflected the conviction, broadly shared among military and political elites in the regime, that only uncompromising nationalization could secure Germany's lasting control of strategically important territory. The incompatibility of Polish national and German imperial interests was taken for granted. Both Nazi leaders and military commanders based their policies of ethnic management on the assumption that the Polish nation was a sophisticated threat to the German Reich and prone to treachery. The German imperialists of 1939 firmly believed that Poles would invariably conspire to undermine German authority. They concluded that no political solution was possible. Indeed, nobody advanced serious proposals for a negotiated settlement with the Polish nation. The lands of Poland, they believed, could only be pacified through brutal violence and secured through rapid Germanization.

The Nazi regime had actually explored diplomatic cooperation with Poland in the 1930s.[88] Soon after seizing power Hitler deliberately relaxed tensions with Poland and even concluded a non-aggression pact with Warsaw in 1934.[89] He also pursued an anti-Soviet alliance with Poland until 1938.[90] The motives of these overtures are suspect. Hitler had compelling reasons for relaxing tensions with Poland. The new regime needed room to maneuver diplomatically as it rebuilt the German army.[91] Establishing more cordial relations with Warsaw mitigated the threat of Poland and France launching a preventative war to overthrow the Nazi regime.[92] Given Hitler's obsession with the conquest of *Lebensraum* in the Soviet Union, it seems rather unlikely that he intended to preserve an independent Polish state in what would become the geographic and strategic center of the future German Reich.

In any case, when an anti-Soviet alliance was not forthcoming, Hitler resolved to conquer Poland and impose German rule through the routine application of violence and relentless Germanization. The Polish state would be destroyed. At a conference in the Reich Chancellery in November 1937, Hitler already sketched a rough blueprint for Germany's eastward expansion. The first phase of this conquest, he suggested, would involve carving up Eastern Europe with the Soviet Union and wiping away the independent states which had emerged there after 1918.[93] After consolidating Germany's position in Central and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union would be the next target.[94] In March 1939 Hitler had instructed the Wehrmacht to beginning planning the invasion Poland. In a later speech to Wehrmacht Commanders, Hitler explained that "the

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[84] Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," 9.
[85] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 75.
[86] Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3, 104, 114–28.
[87] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 75; Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*, 10.
[88] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 182.
[89] Ibid., 186–87.
[90] Ibid., 188–93.
[91] Ibid., 185.
[92] Piłsudski had actually floated the idea of a preventative war to overthrow the Nazi regime in 1933. Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 2.
[93] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 265.
[94] Ibid.

destruction of Poland" had "priority" in this campaign.[95]

Wehrmacht commanders enthusiastically supported war against Poland in 1939. Field Marshall Erich von Manstein recalled that Poland had been "a source of bitterness" to him and his fellow Wehrmacht commanders before the war. They had resented Warsaw's acquisition of German territory at Versailles and reviled Poland as a persistent threat to Germany. "Every time we looked at the map", he wrote of Poland, "we were reminded of our precarious situation".[96] The officer corps of the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht had long considered the reclamation of territory in Poland indispensible for the strategic security of the German state. Conquest in Poland promised to reunite East Prussia with the rest of Germany, and to fortify Germany's vulnerable eastern border. The defeat of Poland would also break Germany's encirclement and destroy a militarily powerful rival, which the officer corps had come to regard as inexorably hostile to Berlin. Wehrmacht leadership therefore supported both war against Poland and the specific goal of destroying the Polish state. Franz Halder, the Wehrmacht's Chief of the General Staff had been deeply skeptical of Hitler's leadership. However in a 1939 speech before the officers of the Armed Forces academy, he endorsed uncompromising action against Poland. "Poland must not only be struck down, but liquidated as quickly as possible".[97] General Erich Hoepner agreed that "the Polish question must be solved once and for all".[98]

From its earliest planning phases, the campaign against Poland was intended to secure the Reich's permanent control over territory through the violent suppression of native resistance and rapid ethnic homogenization.[99] In a May meeting in the Reich Chancellery, Hitler signaled his intention to secure Germany's permanent control over these new territories through rapid Germanization. This would be necessary, he noted, because of Poles' inherent treachery.[100] "Poland", he warned, "will always stand by the side of our adversaries" and "exploit every opportunity to do us harm".[101] German planners therefore prepared the systematic decapitation of Polish society as the first step in the complete subjugation of the Polish nation. As the centerpiece of SS efforts to pacify occupied territory, Reinhard Heydrich orchestrated Operation Tannenberg. The operation called for Einsatzgruppen to seek out and eliminate Polish intellectuals, political leaders, clergy and other potential nodes of national resistance.[102] It simultaneously aimed to disrupt or destroy political organizations, associations, and religious congregations which might coordinate resistance to German rule in the future.[103] Einsatzgruppen were warned that Poles were likely to organize covert networks modeled on Piłsudski's POW in WWI, and were instructed to prioritize the destruction of these paramilitary groups.[104] When the invasion of Poland began on 1 September 1939, the Einsatzgruppen launched a murderous campaign against these "leading classes" of Polish society.[105]

The German army participated willingly in the terrorization of Polish society and frequently tolerated or supported SS operations, even when they lacked explicit instructions to do so.[106] German army intelligence assisted the SS in drawing up special search-lists of Polish elites prior the campaign, and distributed these lists to each army operation group.[107] Though aware of SS plans to arrest approximately 30,000 Poles for detainment in concentration camps, the OKH

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[95] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 64.
[96] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 7.
[97] Quoted in Ibid.
[98] Quoted in Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 2.
[100] Ibid., 9.
[101] Quoted in Ibid.
[102] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 66; Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, XIII, 14, 227–28.
[103] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 14.
[104] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 66.
[105] Eugeniusz Cezary Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg: Charakteristik und Wahrnehmung," in *Erster Weltkrieg Zweiter Weltkrieg: Ein Vergleich, Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Erich Volkmann and Bruno Thoß (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), 583.
[106] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 230.
[107] Ibid., 14–16.

did not raise any strenuous objections.[108] Army Commanders also routinely employed excessive violence on their own initiative to establish German mastery over the civilian population.[109] Wehrmacht firing squads killed no fewer than 16,000 Polish civilians in September and October of 1939.[110] Field commanders often razed entire villages, either as collective punishment for partisan activity or even as a prophylactic measure to secure territory.[111] Wehrmacht units frequently took members of the Polish intelligentsia hostage to deter paramilitary activity, reasoning that their execution would deprive the resistance movement of its leadership and accelerate the eventual pacification of Poland.[112] The murder and unrelenting violence perpetrated against Polish civilians met with only scattered objections among Wehrmacht commanders.[113]

The Wehrmacht supported this brutality in large part because both its leaders and rank and file widely agreed that securing control of Polish territory required the liberal application of violence to subjugate the Polish masses and eliminate the potential leaders of resistance.[114] The OKH and officer corps were willing to cooperate with SS operations because they understood these as necessary to clear away partisans which would otherwise harass their own units or challenge German rule in the future.[115] This view can only be partly attributed to the influence of the regime's official racial ideology. The Wehrmacht leadership and much of the officer corps and had been socialized prior to the rise of the Nazi party, and many in this rather conservative caste still regarded the National Socialists with suspicion, some even with cool disdain.

The Wehrmacht instead drew upon the stereotypes of Poles and assumptions about managing foreign space developed by the *Reichswehr* from the lessons of WWI.[116] Before the war, internal Wehrmacht intelligence profiles of Poland had concluded that Poles were, overall, fiercely loyal to their nation and more than willing to employ treachery in its defense.[117] They cautioned commanders to expect determined, organized, and effective resistance from civilian populations. One 1939 report described Poles as uncompromising, fanatically loyal to the nation, and impossible to reason with. "In his demands he is immoderate, in his promises unreliable".[118]

> Just as his arrogant national consciousness can be increased to the most ardent Chauvinism, so he loses himself in his hatreds to senselessness and blind fanaticism.[119]

Viewing Poles as natural paramilitarists, Wehrmacht commanders obsessed over the threat of guerrilla actions during the campaign. Halder repeatedly expressed concerns about the army being mired in long guerilla war in Poland.[120] Just before the invasion, Wagner issued guidelines for securing enemy territory to army units, calling for the summary internment of all Polish men of military age.[121] General Brauchitsch instructed his army to meet resistance with demonstrative violence. "Any insult of, or attack on the German armed forces and the German people," he warned, "is to be answered with the severest means. The German soldier should never forget that the civilian population… is inwardly hostile despite outward friendliness".[122] Prior to the

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[108] Ibid., 21–22.
[109] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 68.
[110] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 87.
[111] Ibid., 125.
[112] Ibid., 133.
[113] Ibid., 83; Alan Kramer, "German War Crimes 1914 and 1941: The Question of Continuity," in *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives*, ed. Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 246.
[114] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 229.
[115] Ibid., 23.
[116] Ibid., 221.
[117] Ibid., 24–26.
[118] Hasso von Wedel, "Wehrmacht Intelligence Description of Poland and Its Population," August 1939, RW6/98, BArch.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 26.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 177.

campaign the OKH had clearly indicated that attacks on Poland's civilian intelligentsia would be necessary to suppress the resistance of an inveterately hostile and devious population.[123]

Discussions within the Nazi leadership over how to govern Polish space after the military campaign focused intently on finding the most effective and practical methods of nationalizing imperialism. There was virtually unanimous support for managing the Polish population through some mixture of subjugation, colonization, and ethnic cleansing. Given the strategic importance of Poland to plans for German hegemony, and the firm conviction that Poles were invariably hostile to Germany, there were no serious proposals for establishing a Polish state under German suzerainty from either military or civilian quarters.

The prospect of peace with the Western Powers did briefly raise the possibility of a Polish rump state. On 7 September, Hitler conferred with the OKH on the possibility of creating a "rump-Poland", a miniscule territory around "Narew-Warsaw" to be left to Poland as an incentive to bring France and England to the negotiating table.[124] But this proposal envisioned a crippled and subjugated territory, without any real autonomy. As conditions for its existence it could have no ties to the Western Powers, and would be entirely demilitarized.[125] It would be completely beholden to Berlin's demands, and the Reich would have unrestricted authority to intervene in its affairs.[126] The proposed rump-Poland was less an autonomous state than a reservation. In any case, when the Western allies refused to negotiate, the proposal was unceremoniously dropped.[127]

Plans for integrating Polish space into the Reich instead crystalized around policies of Germanization, prophylactic ethnic cleansing, and the subjugation of Poles into helotry. Hitler declared his intention to make Poles into "cheap slaves".[128] Even Rosenberg, who would later champion more conciliatory occupation policies in the Soviet Union, considered the "elimination" of Poland strategically indispensible.[129] From late September through early October, Berlin split the Polish territory it had occupied, annexing roughly half and designating the other half as the Government General (*Generalgouvernement*).[130] Territories annexed to the Reich were to be purged of their Polish and Jewish inhabitants.[131] The *Generalgouvernement* was conceived as a dumping ground for expellees, and a reservation for Polish helots.[132] Policies of ethnic management in both regions focused on atomizing Polish resistance to the greatest extent possible. A conference in the RSHA among SS leadership thus concluded that "For Poland, no Protectorate government is thus envisaged, but rather a completely German administration… the leading strata of the population in Poland shall be made as good as harmless".[133]

The agencies and officials of the German Reich immediately set to work ruthlessly Germanizing territories annexed from Poland.[134] Polish schools and cultural institutions were systematically dissolved, as "the maintenance of an independent national Polish cultural existence" was to be "absolutely prevented".[135] Policies to suffocate Polish culture were paired

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[123] Ibid., 27.
[124] OKH, "OKH: Operationsabteilung Kriegstagebuch," September 1939, 10, RH2/310, BArch; Franz Halder, "Chef Gen St d H, Gen. Oberst F. Halder: Tagebuch," August 14, 1939, 61, RH2/108, BArch; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 212.
[125] Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg," 582.
[126] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 73.
[127] Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg," 583.
[128] Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005): 437.
[129] Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre Deutsche Polenpolitik*, 182–83.
[130] Ibid., 214.To avoid confusion with the GGW, I will henceforth refer to the Nazi zone of occupation as the *Generalgouvernement*.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, "Besprechungen des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD mit den Chefs der einzelnen Ämter," September 7, 1939, 2, R58/825, BArch.
[134] Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg," 584.
[135] Dr. E. Wetzel and Dr. G. Hecht, "Die Frage der Behandlung der Bevölkerung der ehemaligen polnischen Gebiete nach rassenpolitischen Gesichtspunkten. Im Auftrag des Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP," November 25, 1939, 17, R49/75, BArch.

with the ruthless deportation or even murder of Poles who the SS determined could not be Germanized.[136] Himmler's Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom (RKFDV) soon began dragooning thousands of Poles from annexed regions into the *Generalgouvernement*, generally with little notice to the affected populations and even less regard for their provision with food or shelter.[137] Himmler met objections about the economic costs deportations by arguing that aggressive Germanization was indispensible for the Reich's long term security.

> Provinces and Lands are only really German, if they are fundamentally, until the last man and until the last woman… settled by Germans. One only possesses a country, when also the last resident of this territory belongs to the proper Volk. Alsace-Lorraine and the Eastern provinces, in which one did not act according to this principles up to 1918, may be here lesson [Lehre] and experience.[138]

He imagined that seven eighth's of the current Polish populations would need to be expelled in the long run.[139] The remaining eighth could be considered candidates for Germanization. The slaughter of Polish civilians also continued virtually unabated. By the end of 1939, approximately 50,000 civilians had been murdered.[140]

The administration of the *Generalgouvernement* likewise violently suppressed Polish resistance and atomized Polish society.[141] Above all, the *Generalgouvernement* was designed to prevent the resurrection of any Polish government or organization that could coordinate resistance against the Reich.[142] To this end, the racial political office of the RKFdV declared in November 1939 that, whatever constitutional status the *Generalgouvernement* might eventually adopt, resident Poles could not possess "autonomous political rights" under any circumstances. The "foundation of political parties and associations" was to be forbidden, as these might serve as the "focal-point for further national assembly".[143] Universities and institutes of higher education would be denied to the Poles in the *Generalgouvernement*, in part because "higher and middle schools have always been the focal-point of Polish-chauvinist education".[144] Only the most basic education could be permitted, stripped of subjects like history or literature which might foster a sense of Polish identity.[145]

The *Generalgouvernement*'s determination to prevent the resurrection of Polish statehood and readiness to employ violence to assert German rule drew upon memories of the Kingdom of Poland's supposed 'betrayal' of the German Empire in 1918. Lothar Weirauch, the leader of the occupation's Department of Population and Welfare, described the *Generalgouvernement's* task as subjugating the same "Polish state, which had immediately opened a front against everything German in the autumn of 1918, even though the Central Powers had created the first foundations of its stately existence after the successful campaign against Russia".[146] Effectively ruling this treacherous population, he argued, required "eliminating" the "damaging influence" of the Polish "upper class" throughout the country.[147] Indeed the administration of the *Generalgouvernement* continued to fear that Poles were coordinating a vast conspiracy or revolt against German rule. Through 1940, fears of renewed Polish resistance prompted the *Generalgouvernement* to launch

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[136] Ibid., 20. 24.
[137] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 82.
[138] Reichsführer SS, "Commentary on Archive Report 14 by Reichsführer SS, 24 June 1940," June 24, 1940, 2, NS19/3282, BArch.
[139] Ibid., 4.
[140] Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 234.
[141] Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg," 583; Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 89.
[142] Wetzel and Hecht, "Die Frage der Behandlung der Bevölkerung der ehemaligen polnischen Gebiete nach rassenpolitischen Gesichtspunkten. Im Auftrag des Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP," 24–25, 36.
[143] Ibid., 36.
[144] Ibid., 37.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Lothar Weirauch, "Die Volksgruppen im Genralgouvernement" (Europäische Revue, Mai 1942), 23, R52-II/250, BArch.
[147] Ibid., 26.

new waves of arrests.[148] On the eve of the invasion of France, 30,000 of the remaining Polish political elite were detained, of which several thousand were shot. Hans Frank, Hitler's Governor General, explained that this operation was "intended to finish off at an accelerated pace the mass of the rebellious resistance politicians and other politically suspect individuals in our hands… to ensure that no further resistance emerges from the Polish people".[149]

If some in the Wehrmacht preferred to leave the outright murder of civilians to the SS, the German army still generally shared the view that strategic security demanded ethnic homogeneity. Following the campaign, the OKH set to work consolidating the Reich's new fortified frontier to the east.[150] In a 17 January 1940 meeting with representatives of the *Generalgouvernement*, the OKH recommended establishing a North-South line of fortifications in conquered Poland as a second line of defense in the event of war with the Soviet Union.[151] This system of fortifications would follow the "Narew-Vistula-San line", essentially bisecting the *Generalgouvernement*.[152] To protect this "eastern security zone [*Ostsicherungszone*]" from sabotage or native resistance, the Wehrmacht recommended establishing a wider "protection zone" around the fortified line, a continuous belt of territory twenty kilometers wide where settlement would be tightly constricted.[153] The OKH further demanded the creation of three massive "training-centers" adjacent to this fortified line.[154] These would function as military colonies, and the Wehrmacht insisted that their security would require the complete Germanization of a 50 kilometer radius of territory around them. Neither Poles nor Jews, Wehrmacht representatives insisted, could be permitted to settle there.[155] Instead the OKH recommended Germanizing this *Ostsicherungszone* through the settlement of 400,000 German families. If proposed on a more limited scale, the Wehrmacht nonetheless equated ethnic homogeneity with strategic security. Only by clearing much of the *Ostsicherungszone* of Polish civilians, Wehrmacht officials believed, could Germany ensure that no partisans or mass uprisings would sabotage the army's defensive lines in the event of war.

The conquest and incorporation of Polish territory in 1939 closely followed the lessons of ethnic management which had been firmly established in German imperial culture by the experiences of occupying Congress Poland in WWI. Both the Wehrmacht and Nazi leadership operated under the essentially unchallenged assumption that Poles were fiercely nationalistic and uncompromisingly hostile to the German Reich, and that they would fight bitterly, persistently, and treacherously to undermine German rule. No imperial planners in 1939, whether military or civilian, thought that a stable compromise with the Polish nation could be negotiated. There were no proposals for an autonomous Polish state, and indeed policy-makers prioritized the complete destruction of Polish military, political, and cultural organizations as a primary objective of the campaign. Lacking any other means to stabilize German control over conquered territory, both Wehrmacht commanders and National Socialist planners resolved to rule former Polish space through brutal violence, Germanization, and ethnic cleansing.

Recent historiography has often emphasized the self-consciously colonialist rhetoric of National Socialists as they discussed how to govern Polish space after 1939.[156] Hans Frank routinely stated that the *Generalgouvernement* would be "treated like a colony" and Poles as "slaves of the German Empire".[157] This, historians have suggested, represented the culmination of a long rhetorical-colonization of the East. Decades of portraying Poles as inferior colonial

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[148] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 90.
[149] Quoted in Ibid.
[150] Reichsverteidigungsausschuss für Polen, "Bericht über die am 16. U. 17. 1. 1940 in Lodsch stattgehabte Besprechung betr. Planungen der Wehrmacht im neuen Ostraum," January 17, 1940, 16, R53-23/22, BArch.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 10.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 10–11.
[156] Kristin Kopp, "Arguing the Case for a Colonial Poland," in *German Colonialism : Race, the Holocaust and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 146.
[157] Quoted in Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 438.

subjects, they argue, had by 1939 given Nazi imperialists license to purge and reengineer Polish space to make way for the civilized German race. However, this focus on colonial rhetoric misses the deeper anxieties which motivated German imperial planners in 1939. The policies espoused to secure control of Poland suggest that Germans did not really believe they were taking possession of colonial space in 1939. They were trying to *create* colonial space by systematically destroying every trace of Polish statehood, society, and national culture. The impulse to kill off Polish intellectuals presumed that Poland was a developed nation, and thus a potential rival. Operation Tannenberg sought to *realize* the fantasy of Poland as a colonial space, a region of illiterate Poles governed by German masters. The brutal anti-Polish violence of the Nazi regime after 1939 manifested firmly entrenched anxieties about the sophisticated capacity of the Polish nation to resist and subvert German rule, and represented radical methods of ethnic management to address these fears.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 reprised this pattern of ethnic management and imperial organization on a grand scale. The vanguard units of the Wehrmacht were actually often welcomed as liberators by civilians populations who despised Soviet rule, especially in the Baltics and Ukraine.[158] But despite the availability of large, disaffected populations willing to work with a moderate occupation to dismantle the Soviet Union, German imperialists rigidly equated the long-term control of territory with its complete Germanization. Operation Barbarossa therefore initiated an orgy of violence to prophylactically suppress any resistance to German rule. In the days before the invasion, Hitler proclaimed to military and civilian planners that invading units should seize "the opportunity to exterminate anyone who is hostile to us [since] naturally the vast area must be pacified as quickly as possible".[159] The war effort was prosecuted to kill off as much of the Soviet civilian population as possible.[160] The Wehrmacht allowed 3.3 million Red Army prisoners to die in captivity through deliberate starvation, exposure to the elements, and slave labor under horrific conditions.[161] Hundreds of thousands of civilians were executed over the course of the campaign, shot or hanged in Wehrmacht or SS operations. Thousands of villages were burned.[162] Indeed, Hitler repeatedly spoke of his intention to reduce the major cities of the Soviet Union to rubble, an act which he considered a "prerequisite" for German rule in the east.[163] Wiping out major metropoles would effectively deny centers of political power to natives, precluding the emergence of coordinated native resistance and wiping the slate clean for German rule. After occupying Kiev, Germans starved the city, establishing roadblocks to prevent the import of food.[164]

Long term plans for the consolidation of the Reich in former Soviet space likewise focused on the violent subjugation of natives, the suppression of national culture and identity, ethnic cleansing, and German colonization. Alfred Rosenberg's proposals were the notable exception to this trend. Hitler had nominally tasked Rosenberg with heading the administration of occupied territories of the Soviet Union as head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* or RMfdbO). Rosenberg urged Berlin to style the invasion as an effort to liberate the peoples of the Soviet Union from the communist regime, and enlist broad native collaboration by promising cultural and political self-governance.[165] He repeatedly insisted that the Soviet Union could only be defeated by fragmenting the state along national lines, and establishing puppet regimes in the Baltics and Ukraine.[166]

However, even Rosenberg's 1941 proposals for indirect rule envisioned only a limited

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[158] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 266.
[159] Quoted in Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 445.
[160] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 139.
[161] Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz," 443.
[162] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 140.
[163] Werner Koeppen, "Aufzeichnungen des persönlichen Referenten Rosenbergs, des SA-Standartenführers Dr. Werner Koeppen über Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier," November 6, 1941, 12, 52, R6/34a, BArch; Martin Bormann, "Letter to Alfred Rosenberg, 23 July 1942," July 23, 1942, 2, NS19/2303, BArch.
[164] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 140.
[165] Ibid., 145.
[166] Ibid., 146.

degree of native self-administration. In September 1941 Rosenberg proposed dangling the possibility of future Ukrainian self-governance to buy the population's passive acceptance of the wartime occupation.[167] However, Rosenberg actually advised against creating any centralized institutions of Ukrainian self-administration. Region-wide governance, he told Hitler, should remain firmly in German hands. Ukrainian self-administration should be limited to the municipal and county levels.[168] Rosenberg further advised the occupation to refrain from creating any "institutions of higher-education" in Ukraine, as the Reich had no interest in creating a Ukrainian national intelligentsia which might obstruct German efforts at economic exploitation in the coming years.[169] Indeed, he argued that Germany's imperial interests lay in disrupting any centralized institutions of Ukrainian culture, especially by weakening the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.[170] In this September proposal, at least, Rosenberg expressed no interest in establishing a durable autonomous Ukrainian state as a strategic partner of the German Reich, much less a Ukrainian national army. At this point Rosenberg only argued that vague promises of future self-administration would serve Germany's current war effort against the Soviet Union.

Even Rosenberg's proposals for limited political concessions faced stiff opposition from the rest of the Nazi leadership. Berlin never really took Rosenberg's recommendations seriously, and Hitler routinely supported the more draconian and violent methods of subordinates like Erich Koch, the Reichskommissar for Ukraine.[171] Hitler, Himmler, and the SS all wanted to avoid opening any room native self-rule in the occupied Soviet Union.[172]. Hitler insisted that permitting the existence of any native political organization or educational institutions would "cultivate" future civilian "resistance" to German authority.[173] German rule, the Nazi leadership insisted, would not rely on negotiation or collaboration with natives, but on their comprehensive subjugation.[174] Hitler sketched his basic vision for governing Soviet space in a meeting with Bormann and Keitel on 16 July 1941. The native population, he asserted, would be demilitarized, with only Germans permitted to bear firearms in the future. Germany would strenuously prevent the emergence of any competing military or paramilitary organizations in the former Soviet Union, and ensure the Reich's complete monopolization of the means of violence.[175] Himmler and the increasingly influential agencies of the SS, likewise had no intention of permitting any significant degree of native self-governance in the Soviet Union.[176]

The National Socialist vision of ethnic management was most clearly articulated in *Generalplan Ost*, a proposal compiled by Konrad Meyer and the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, or RKFDV) in June 1942.[177] *Generalplan Ost* proposed the violent demographic reengineering of the former Soviet Union to secure Germany's permanent command of a decimated and thoroughly subjugated population. 25 years after the war, the planners imagined that 31 million inhabitants of the conquered territory would have been deported to Siberia. The remaining 14 million native inhabitants would serve as helots for a patchwork of German military colonies established throughout the vast conquered territories west of the Urals.[178]

Generalplan Ost also reopened discussion of plans for Poland, scheduling the removal of

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[167] Alfred Rosenberg, "Minutes of Meeting between Hitler, Rosenberg, Lammers, and Bormann, 29 September 1941," September 29, 1941, 6, R6/4, BArch.
[168] Ibid., 8.
[169] Ibid., 7–8.
[170] Ibid., 8.
[171] Gerd Koenen, "Der deutsche Russland-Komplex: Zur Ambivalenz deutscher Ostorientierungen in der Weltkriegsphase," in *Traumland Osten: Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gregor Thum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 12.
[172] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 270.
[173] Bormann, "Letter to Alfred Rosenberg, 23 July 1942," 1.
[174] Ibid., 2.
[175] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 148.
[176] Ibid., 146.
[177] Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 268.
[178] Ibid.

80-85% of the Polish population to Siberia within the first two decades after the war.[179] Indeed, one planner in the RKFdV argued that Poles demanded special consideration in the future imperial order. As the "most anti-German", "most dangerous", and most conspiratorial of the foreign nations conquered by the Reich, he warned against simply deporting 20 million Poles to Siberia.[180] These, he feared, would eventually constitute a "danger" to German rule, a focal point for "the standing insurrection against the German order".[181] He speculated that Poles would organize a new state in Siberia to challenge the Reich, and might even begin to Polonize the other Slavs recently displaced across the Urals.[182] Inevitably, they would militarily threaten the German Reich. The SS planner therefore suggested finding an alternative dumping ground for Poles, much further from German frontiers. He proposed Brazil.[183] He concluded by warning that the ethnic Germanization of the East was absolutely necessary to ensure the stability and durability of the new German Reich.[184]

Memories of the German Empire's failed attempt to establish German-Polish union in WWI directly influenced imperial policy-making during WWII, effectively discrediting multinationalism as a viable method for imperial expansion. This influence is most apparent in debates among policy-makers during the emerging military crises of 1942-1943. Until 1942, imperial planners had assumed that Germany would achieve military victory through its own resources. The feasibility and advantages of nationalizing imperialism had all been generally accepted without challenge. In 1942 Germany's military position on the Eastern Front deteriorated significantly. Determined Soviet resistance raised doubts as to whether the Wehrmacht could ultimately vanquish the Red Army, and spurred German imperialists to reevaluate their occupation policies and strategies of ethnic management. In this moment of crisis, several military and civilian thinkers raised the possibility of attempting to recruit the collaboration of Eastern European peoples to either supplement Germany's battered military ranks or break the solidarity of the Soviet Union. Desperate military conditions compelled imperial thinkers to set aside their concerns about long-term imperial stability and prioritize enlisting Eastern European nations to overthrow the Soviet Union.

However, the memory of multinationalism's failure in Congress Poland in WWI limited and ultimately prevented any revision of imperial policy after 1942. The lessons of WWI constrained the very parameters of the debate. By now German imperialists accepted it as axiomatic that autonomous protectorates were inherently unreliable. Proponents of enlisting native collaboration supported granting economic and political concessions to Eastern European peoples. Some even recommended establishing limited forms of autonomy in areas of the Soviet Union. However, the most generous of these proposals imagined delegating significantly less autonomy to natives, and establishing far more invasive mechanisms of German control, than proposals for an autonomous Polish state under German suzerainty in WWI. Memory of the GGW also became the main historical reference point for debate over adopting even these limited proposals. After 1942, skeptics of a more collaborationist policy in Eastern Europe routinely cited the apparent failure of multinational imperialism in Congress Poland to denounce proposed reforms. Poles' resistance to German suzerainty and the eventual collapse of the German occupation in 1918, they argued, demonstrated that foreign nations could not be trusted to serve the interests of the German Reich. Establishing autonomous states, they insisted, would only organize and equip nations to eventually secede from, or even conspire against the Reich.

Serious proposals for reforming occupation policy in the Soviet Union followed shortly after the Red Army halted the German advance outside of Moscow. Wehrmacht generals quickly realized that they needed more manpower and fewer disruptions in rear areas to continue fighting a determined opponent with seemingly inexhaustible supplies of manpower and materiel. On 13

[179] Król, "Besatzungsherrschaft in Polen im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg," 585.
[180] Dr. E. Wetzel, "Stellungnahme und Gedanken zum Generalplan Ost des Reichsführers SS," April 27, 1942, 15, R49/2490, BArch.
[181] Ibid., 17–18.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., 18.
[184] Ibid., 43.

December 1941, OKH was already beginning to reevaluate Germany's political strategy and military campaign. In a message to Rosenberg, Quartermaster General Eduard Wagner wrote that the new "military situation demands the exploitation of the population in the occupied eastern territories".[185] Wagner proposed that occupation authorities begin dissolving collective farms and restoring private property to Soviet peasants to entice their cooperation.[186] In an 18 December conference with RMfdbO personnel, the Wehrmacht's Army Group Rear Area Commanders for the Soviet theater agreed that Germany's war effort would benefit greatly if army units did not have to contend with active resistance from occupied civilians. Like Wagner, the conference participants suggested restoring private property and beginning agrarian reforms.[187] Reopening schools, delegating local administrative responsibilities to natives, and other unspecified political concessions were also discussed at later meetings.[188] The Wehrmacht's interest in reform, however was limited to these modest concessions. They did not suggest granting any significant degree of political autonomy to occupied populations. Their proposed reforms were intended merely to ensure the tranquility of rear areas while the Wehrmacht continued its operations.

Otto Bräutigam, a Foreign Office functionary and official of the RMfdbO, submitted a more comprehensive reform proposal in late January 1942. Bräutigam proposed the creation of a Russian "puppet government [*Scheinregierung*]" headed by a captured Soviet general.[189] He hoped that such a government could ease the burden of administering the vast expanses of occupied Soviet territory.[190] Bräutigam also imagined that this Russian government could organize new army units from Soviet prisoners of war, and either deploy them against the Red Army alongside the Wehrmacht, or use them to secure occupied territory.[191]

Bräutigam recognized that the creation of a puppet government entailed the danger of defection and betrayal. He bluntly admitted that "such a General could suddenly turn against us, if our policy did not please him".[192] Bräutigam therefore proposed substantial limitations to Russian autonomy to preclude such a defection. The Russian puppet-government, he insisted, should not to be granted unqualified control over any territory. German troops alone would garrison the large cities and other "centers of power" in the occupied Soviet Union. Russian soldiers would only police the countryside, or be deployed in frontline combat.[193] While Bräutigam wanted to exploit Russian manpower for military use, he did not want to establish a cohesive Russian national army. To prevent any large-scale military mutinies, he recommended parceling Russian forces into small elements and integrating them into larger German units. This would avoid the creation of any consolidated military force, which the puppet government might wield against the German Reich.

This proposal should not be understood as a reprisal of multinational imperialism. Of the reform proposals generated in 1942, Bräutigam recommended some of the most far-reaching political concessions to Soviet natives. However, even he was unwilling to establish anything like a fully autonomous national state under German suzerainty on the model of the German-Polish union. Bräutigam imagined that this proposed Russian puppet government would have only a very limited degree of autonomy in the long run. After using Russian manpower to defeat the Soviet Union, the regime would become the "mouthpiece" for a new Reichskommissariat of Russia under German authority. Perhaps in the future this puppet government could be "harnessed in an appropriate form" to take over the day-to-day civil administration of the

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[185] Eduard Wagner, "Letter to Alfred Rosenberg, 13 December 1941," December 13, 1941, 1, R6/139, BArch.
[186] Ibid.
[187] RMfbdO, "Minutes of Conference between RMfbdO and Army Group Rear Area Commands, 22 December 1941," December 22, 1941, 8, R6/139, BArch.
[188] RMfbdO, "Minutes of Conference between RMfbdO and Army Group Rear Area Commands, 18 December 1942," December 18, 1942, 6, NS19/2605, BArch.
[189] Otto Bräutigam, "Vorschlag Bräutigams zur Einsetzung einer russischen Scheinregierung unter Führung eines in Gefangenschaft geratenen Generals der Roten Armee," January 29, 1942, 1, N1721/1, BArch.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 2.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.

territory.[194] But Bräutigam declined to clarify either the extent of this government's competence or the nature of its dependency on the German Reich. The size and even location of this proposed Russian state were likewise vague afterthoughts in his plans. These were matters to be addressed after Germany had already smashed the Red Army. Indeed, Bräutigam was reluctant to entrust a Russian state with any strategically important territory, and instead pondered displacing the puppet-state into Siberia. Indeed he suggested that Berlin could grant the Russian government a charter over those marginal regions of the Soviet Union that the German Reich did not intend to take for itself.[195] While Germany consolidated its control over the newly seized territories of the Soviet Union, this puppet-government could be set loose to carve out its own space in Siberia.[196]

From his fiefdom in the *Generalgouvernement* Hans Frank also began to realize the potential value of native cooperation. In 1942 he explored mitigating the brutality of German occupation policy and attempting to convince Poles that they could have a future under National Socialism.[197] By 1943, Frank had developed more concrete ideas. In a 23 February meeting with his staff Frank proposed nothing less than a comprehensive reorientation in how Germany justified its administration of the *Generalgouvernement*.[198] Given Germany's desperate need to enlist the collaboration of Poles and other *Ostvölker* against the Soviet Union, Frank insisted that an occupation "policy of revolvers, bullets, and concentration camps" was no longer rational.[199] For the moment, Frank argued, propaganda efforts should focus on convincing the *Ostvölker* that Germany's victory against the Soviet Union accorded with their own interests.[200] Above all, this required combatting the impression that Germany intended to establish "a relationship of permanent subjugation" over the peoples of Eastern Europe. This would demand abstaining from rhetoric of colonial mastery and scaling back Germanization and colonization efforts in occupied territories.[201] In particular, he wanted to suspend a German settlement project in the district of Lublin.[202] According to one report from the meeting, Frank also proposed granting "far-reaching freedoms" to the Polish population of the *Generalgouvernement*, especially in terms of cultural associations and activities.[203]

Frank's proposals for mobilizing anti-Soviet Polish collaboration were very limited. They were concerned mainly with ending offensive rhetoric and restraining Germanization policies which would obviously preclude the cooperation of the *Ostvölker*. He did not promote the creation of autonomous states. But even Frank's calls for a relaxation of Germanization efforts met with stiff opposition. One internal critic even requested Berlin's intervention to halt the proposed reforms.[204] Frank's critics invariably argued that a more permissive strategy of ethnic management would expose the Reich to nationalist conspiracies by Poles and other *Ostvölker*.

Some members of the *Generalgouvernement* recognized that Germany's dire military situation required at least some concessions to the constituent nations of the Soviet Union, but maintained that the future stability of the Reich still demanded the remorseless Germanization of Polish space. In a memorandum submitted to the *Generalgouvernement* on 12 May 1943, SS Sturmbannführer Schenk outlined his reluctant support for creating an Ukrainian protectorate.[205] Schenk noted that the formation of autonomous national states was, as a rule, to be avoided because it represented an inherently unstable foundation for imperial organization. Such states could always "become dangerous in the future".[206] Optimally, Schenk believed, German control

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[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 250.
[198] Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Krüger, "Denkschrift: Verhältnisse im Generalgouvernement," April 9, 1943, 58, NS19/2664, BArch.
[199] Ibid., 59–60.
[200] Ibid., 59.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid., 60.
[203] Ibid., 61.
[204] Ibid., 63.
[205] SS Sturmbannführer Schenk, "The Ukrainian Question: Memorandum," May 12, 1943, 27, R102/207, BArch.
[206] Ibid., 30.

over Soviet territory would be premised on the clearance of its native population and German colonization. However, Schenk admitted that Germany's teetering military position rendered the "purely power-political domination of the entirety of Russia hardly possible". Berlin, he argued, could either implement the "partition of former Russian territory into smaller states", or lose the war.[207] Schenk therefore endorsed the creation of a Ukrainian state with limited autonomy under Germany's authority.[208] Tellingly, he described even this proposed Ukrainian state as a place-holder regime, to be tolerated until the Wehrmacht had smashed the Red Army and consolidated Germany's firm control over more important territories.[209]

However, Schenk still insisted that Germany's future security still required the comprehensive homogenization of the most strategically important territories of Eastern Europe. In particular, Schenk argued that imperial stability demanded the "Germanization of former Polish space".[210] He justified this policy of ethnic management according to traditional strategic concerns. Germany's vulnerable position "in the middle of Europe" necessitated its unassailable control of Poland.[211] This, he insisted, was only possible through nationalizing policies of ethnic management. "Völkisch foundations" would establish a far more durable basis for German rule over Poland than "military power" alone. "If we want to rule the East in the long-run", he argued, Germany needed to colonize and Germanize the entirety of Poland.[212]

Indeed, Schenk warned the *Generalgouvernement* to not to resort to "conciliationist-policies". These were doomed to failure. Polish nationalism, Schenk argued, had successfully imbued the masses with a keen sense of Polish identity over the centuries. He noted that Poland's socialist left and Roman Catholic clergy both showed uncharacteristically strong loyalties to the Polish national cause.[213] The Polish nation, he argued, would never accept German leadership or collaborate with the Reich, regardless of any concessions that Germany might offer. "In the final analysis, it should be said that Polish politics stands in the way of a conciliationist-policy".[214] Though he allowed that the occupation might try to soften Polish resistance with economic concessions, Schenk was adamant that German imperial policy could never relax its repression of Polish education and culture.[215] Germany, Schenk insisted, certainly could not permit the foundation of a Polish state.[216]

Other members of the *Generalgouvernement* perceived a practical need for a revision of occupation policy, but adamantly refused to consider any negotiation with Polish nationalism. On 29 March Dr. Friedrich Gollert, the head of the Office of Spatial Planning in the district of Warsaw, submitted a memorandum entitled the "Final Solution to the Polish Question".[217] Gollert expressed concern with the "Polish resistance movement", and its war for the "restoration of the earlier Polish state".[218] Given the present strength of this movement, Gollert doubted that the *Generalgouvernement*'s autocratic administration could effectively police tens of millions of Poles. He feared that popular resistance would become "extraordinarily dangerous" in the long run.[219] Gollert had no qualms about killing Polish civilians, but for practical reasons he doubted that Germany could simply "eradicate" 15 million Poles to finally resolve the threat of national revolt. Though he believed world opinion would eventually accept the wholesale murder of European Jews, Gollert suspected that the mass extermination of Poles would provoke sustained resistance and lasting international outrage.[220]

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[207] Ibid., 28–30.
[208] Ibid., 34.
[209] Ibid., 30.
[210] Ibid.
[211] SS Sturmbannführer Schenk, "Die Polenfrage," April 21, 1943, 41, R102/207, BArch.
[212] Ibid., 42.
[213] Ibid., 44.
[214] SS Sturmbannführer Schenk, "The Ukrainian Question: Memorandum," 44.
[215] SS Sturmbannführer Schenk, "Die Polenfrage," 50.
[216] Ibid., 54.
[217] Friedrich Gollert, "Final Solution to the Polish Question," March 29, 1943, 1, R102/28, BArch.
[218] Ibid., 1–2.
[219] Ibid., 3.
[220] Ibid.

Despite his deep concerns over the sustainability and feasibility of nationalizing imperialism, Gollert was unwilling to contemplate anything like a multinationalist compromise. He insisted that any Polish state would represent an intrinsic and intolerable threat to the German Reich. He "ruthlessly" opposed the idea of transforming the *Generalgouvernement* into a new Polish protectorate, as any autonomous Polish state would invariably betray Germany.[221] Even if a Polish government were beholden to "the extensive guidelines of a *Reichsprotektor*", Gollert believed that the danger of Polish treachery was too great to permit the restoration of Polish self-governance.[222] He further warned that Poles could not be permitted to develop their own national culture, as Polish nationalism would constitute a "great danger" in the long run. "The Polish danger can only be regarded as banished" he wrote, once the "entirety of the Vistula region" was finally "transformed into German space".[223]

Nor did Gollert believe that mass expulsions could resolve the Polish threat to the German Empire. Resettling the Polish nation "outside of the borders of the German Empire" would simply recreate the threat of Polish irredentism.

> The Polish population, may not be settled to the East of our borders under any circumstances, as they undoubtedly will soon assume leadership there by virtue of their intelligence and will covertly do everything possible to advance into the Vistula-region in due course.[224]

For Gollert, the Polish nation represented a potent rival for a territory he believed was indispensible for the security of the German Reich. The Polish nation could not be repressed, deported, or negotiated with. Even if there were practical obstacles to extermination, Gollert believed the inherent threat posed by the Polish nation to German security required the eventual destruction of the Polish people, root and branch.

Lacking any credible alternatives to nationalizing imperialism, Gollert could only suggest mitigating the backlash against homogenization through a gradual approach. He proposed parsing the Polish population according to their nationalist commitment. Gollert imagined that between seven and eight million Poles could be persuaded to adopt the German national identity. Between four and six million Poles would be doomed to helot labor. Two or three million Poles, Gollert concluded, would need to be eradicated, among them the "Polish fanatics".[225]

The further deterioration of Germany's military position in 1943 generated proposals for more extensive imperial reforms. In an 8 January 1943 meeting, RMfdbO representatives and Army Group Rear Area Commanders concluded that "the cooperation of the [Soviet] population and the prisoners of war" had become a "categorical necessity". The German war effort, they insisted, required permitting some degree of political "independent existence" for the civilian population.[226] For Rosenberg, this meant establishing autonomous national states as German protectorates. In one proposal, Rosenberg suggested building Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian states "under the protective sovereignty [*Schutzhoheit*] of the Reich", though he still declined to clarify if the extent of their future autonomy.[227] Bräutigam, panicking over the battered state of the Wehrmacht and the burgeoning partisan movements in occupied territory, also submitted a new reform proposal in May.[228] He urged Berlin to carve out an autonomous Ukrainian state which would still recognize German claims to food supplies, raw materials, and political leadership.[229]

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[221] Ibid., 2.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., 3.
[224] Ibid., 5.
[225] Ibid., 5–6.
[226] SS Brigadeführer Zimmermann, "Internal Report on Conference between RMfbdO and Army Group Rear Area Commands, 18 December 1942," January 8, 1943, 13, R6/139, BArch.
[227] Bergmann, "Notes on Rosenberg's Ostpolitik, Sent to Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, 20 February 1943," February 20, 1943, 28, R6/139, BArch.
[228] Otto Bräutigam, "Zwei Jahre Deutsche Ukraine-Politik," May 14, 1943, 119–20, R6/70, BArch.
[229] Ibid., 124–25.

Wehrmacht commanders on the Eastern Front offered their own proposals for imperial reform in the spring and summer of 1943. Often these called for native "self-administration", the organization of autonomous states, or other significant political concessions to entice Soviet civilians and prisoners of war to join the anti-Soviet war effort.[230] Several recommended organizing a Russian army under the command of the Red Army defector General Andrey Vlasov.[231] To these imperial planners, the military crisis on the eastern front had made the eventual stability of a future German imperium a secondary consideration. The war could no longer be won by military means alone, they believed, and there would be no imperium unless Germany could enlist the support of the peoples of the Soviet Union.[232]

Still, top Nazi leadership continued to reject federal or quasi-multinationalist approaches to ethnic management, based on their firm conviction that these forms of imperial organization were inherently unstable. In December 1942 discussions with Anton Mussert, the leader of the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands, Hitler categorically eschewed a confederal basis for the future organization of Europe.

> We could not form a confederation, i.e. a state that would exist as a leader of individual states [*Einzelstaaten*], because this entire structure would fall apart again at the next opportunity. Firm junction would therefore be an absolute necessity.[233]

Hitler emphasized that this was especially true along the eastern frontier of the Reich, where the region's strategic value demanded a particularly reliable imperial structure. Here "very durable constructions" were "desperately necessary" to defend Germany from the 'Slavic hordes'.[234]

Throughout 1942 and 1943, Nazi leaders and planners referred to the German-Empire's failed attempt to establish a German-Polish union in WWI as a negative model of imperial organization and ethnic management. The memory of the Kingdom of Poland and multinational imperialism in WWI became a potent symbol, which Nazi leaders and intellectuals used to both reject proposals for conciliationists reforms, and to justify ethnic cleansing as the only means of establishing a lasting German Reich in Eastern Europe. On 28 April 1942 Professor Otto Auhagen gave the keynote speech before the Association for German Settlement and Migration during an event associated with the RKFdV. Not surprisingly, Auhagen's speech identified the colonization and Germanization of Eastern Europe, in particular Poland, as a central aim of Germany's current imperial policy. The Germanization of the Prussian East, Auhagen argued, had been one of the great missed opportunities of the previous war. Even before 1914, he noted, Prussian officials had realized that comprehensive expulsion of Poles from German territory had represented the only feasible solution to the Polish question. Auhagen lamented that the leadership of the German Empire had declined to fortify Prussia's integrity in this manner, and had instead taken the "consequential" step of establishing the Kingdom of Poland in 1916.[235] For no practical gain, Auhagen argued, this course of action had effectively cost Berlin its opportunity to consolidate German control over the Prussian east. In contrast, he celebrated the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which had mandated population exchanges between Greece and Turkey, as a positive model for the national homogenization.[236]

The Nazi leadership also routinely cited the failure of the German-sponsored Kingdom of

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[230] Hauptmann Oberländer, "Bündnis oder Ausbeutung," June 22, 1943, 127–29, R6/70, BArch; "Bericht des Kommandos General d. Sich. Truppen in Gebiet Mitte," 1941, 2–3, R6/139, BArch.
[231] Hauptmann Oberländer, "Bündnis oder Ausbeutung," 129; "Bericht des Kommandos General d. Sich. Truppen in Gebiet Mitte," 2–3.
[232] Hauptmann Oberländer, "Bündnis oder Ausbeutung," 126.
[233] Martin Bormann, "Notes on Meeting Between Adolf Hitler and Anton Mussert on the Future Organization of Europe," December 10, 1942, 11, NS6/161, BArch.
[234] Ibid., 12.
[235] Otto Auhagen, "'Ansiedlung Deutscher Bauern in Den Eingegliederten Ostgebieten', Rede Vor Der Mitgliederversammlung Der Vereinigung Für Deutsche Siedlung Und Wanderung," April 28, 1942, 49, R49/20, BArch.
[236] Ibid.

Poland to justify their continued opposition to conciliationist imperial policies. By May 1943, internecine rivalry and deep disagreements over how to govern Ukraine had led to acute conflict between Rosenberg and Reichskommisar Erich Koch. Rosenberg emphasized the need to relax the brutality and economic exploitation of the regime, which he believed only provoked unnecessary and costly resistance.[237] Koch, in contrast, argued that precisely this severity was the only means of suppressing unrest and combatting the partisan movement.[238] On 19 May Hitler intervened in the ongoing debate in a meeting with Rosenberg and Koch. Hitler sided with Koch, arguing that imperial stability required the systematic and violent suppression of foreign populations. He cited the failure of the German-Polish union in WWI as the latest and most prominent example in a long line of failures by conquerors to "recruit and deploy subjugated nations [*Völker*] as confederates [*Bundesgenossen*]".[239] Bormann also recorded:

> The Führer then described the experiences, which Germany must derive from [its attempt to establish] the Polish state [in WWI]; then too very clever people had thought, that one would win over the Poles, if one gave them as much freedom as possible, if they were armed, if one guaranteed the Polish state, etc. etc.[240]

Multinationalist efforts to strike a bargain with Polish nationalists, Hitler noted, had failed and the battalions of Polish soldiers raised and trained by German commanders had formed the "foundation" for the Polish army after the war.[241] For Hitler, the lessons of German imperial policy in WWI were clear. He concluded that Germany could never hope to win either the positive collaboration or even forbearance of the Ukrainian people. Attempting to establish a Ukrainian state or arming Ukrainians to fight against the Soviet Union would only invite betrayal and disaster.[242] He sanctioned Koch's continued use of brutality to master the situation.

Indeed, Hitler repeatedly used the example of WWI-Polish policy to bat down calls for establishing autonomous states in the Soviet Union. In a conference with military leaders in June 1943, Hitler again recalled the "tragic lesson with the Poles in the World War".[243] He had apparently either read Ludendorff's account on the occupation, or discussed the matter with the former Quartermaster-General. His statement closely mirrored the 'lessons' of the occupation articulated by Ludendorff in his postwar memoires.

> Ludendorff said later: 'People told me I would get 500,000 men.' Any sensible person should have immediately said: 'Those 500,000 Poles won't fight against Russia, rather they are setting up an army to take on Germany and Austria if necessary and to liberate Poland. Each nation thinks of its own interest or not at all… this is all theorizing in cloud cukoo-land, to imagine that our goal is to set up independent, autonomous states.[244]

Himmler too referred to the supposed lessons of WWI to justify his continued opposition to granting autonomy to Russians and other *Ostvölker*. In one speech given in October 1943, Himmler recalled that the "most dangerous members" of the Polish nationalist movement in 1918-1921, had been those Prussian veterans, "members of a foreign national tradition, but drilled and habituated to war, and then trained in the use of weapons by us".[245] He maintained that

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[237] Martin Bormann, "Notes on Meeting Between Erich Koch, Alfred Rosenberg, and Adolf Hitler, 19 May 1943," May 19, 1943, 10–11, R58/1005, BArch.
[238] Ibid., 11.
[239] Ibid., 13.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Quoted in Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 464.
[244] Quoted in Ibid.
[245] Heinrich Himmler, "Vortrag vor der Befehlshabertagung, Bad Schachen, 14 October 1943," October 14, 1943, 12–13, RW6/608, BArch.

Poles' talent for treachery demanded vigilant and uncompromising rule on the part of Germany. Poles, he argued, were "always able to intrigue against every state and against every authority".[246] He applied this "lesson" to governing Slavic populations in general.[247] Himmler allowed that Germany could exploit figures like Vlasov to sap the strength of the Red Army and supplement German ranks, but Slavic leaders could never be trusted with any large military force.[248] Indeed, he insisted on feeding Slavic recruits piecemeal into larger German units. Units with any more than 30 foreigners would invariably manifest "disloyalty" and begin to plot against the Reich.[249]

Nazi leadership therefore failed to confront the dire strategic crisis in 1942-43 with conciliationists reforms at least in part because the failure of German imperial policy in Congress Poland in WWI had long ago sapped multinational imperialism of its apparent credibility. Serious proposals to enlist the cooperation of occupied populations against the Soviet Union came very late and only appeared after mounting resistance by the Red Army had rendered a purely military victory unlikely. Proponents of reform did not argue that collaboration with autonomous states represented the most effective or advantageous form of imperial organization. When they did suggest indigenous self-governance, they did so because they believed that Germany's desperate position required the abatement of partisan resistance and the mobilization of as many Slavic volunteers as it could get. Even then, their proposals for political concessions remained vague, and often refrained from promising real guarantees of national autonomy.

Even these hesitant recommendations for reform met with firm opposition, hardened by what Nazi leadership considered the lessons of the German Empire's occupation policy in Poland in WWI. They interpreted the Poles' apparent rejection of a German-Polish union, and the subsequent collapse of the GGW as obvious proof that the assumptions of multinational imperialism were invalid. They recalled the failure of German occupation policy in WWI as evidence that the interests of foreign nations were incompatible with German interests and that national heterogeneity and federal autonomy were irreconcilable with imperial stability. Even as Wehrmacht commanders siphoned whatever volunteers they could from Soviet populations and prisoners of war, Nazi leadership adamantly refused to repeat what they regarded as the mistakes of the German Empire in WWI. They refused to trust the conquered peoples of Eastern Europe with autonomous states or native governments within a German imperial system.

[246] Ibid., 22.
[247] Ibid., 19.
[248] Ibid., 21.
[249] Ibid., 22.

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