

# 1 Initial Choices and Conditions

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## The Netherlands

The German invasion of the Netherlands commenced on May 10, 1940 and ended with the Dutch armed forces' capitulation four days later.<sup>1</sup> Rapid and decisive though this defeat may have been, the Dutch military did manage to extract a political silver lining from its encounter with the Wehrmacht's overwhelming power: German airborne troops sent behind the lines to capture the royal family in The Hague were held off long enough to allow the escape of Queen Wilhelmina's daughter Juliana and son-in-law Prince Bernhard, along with their children, on May 12, followed by the queen herself on the 13th. The monarch's initial plan of having the British destroyer on which she had embarked take her to join Dutch forces in the country's southwest was overtaken by the rapid advance of German forces; all the royals ended up conveyed to London, with Princess Juliana eventually being sent on to Canada as a hedge against the contingency of a German invasion of the British Isles. The members of the Dutch cabinet, backed by a coalition of most of the country's major political parties, also departed for Britain at the urging of several outspoken ministers, who overrode the hesitations of a somewhat shell-shocked prime minister, Dirk Jan de Geer. In London, they joined two ministers already visiting the UK for the coordination of military efforts. Queen and cabinet together constituted a government-in-exile for the duration of their country's occupation by the enemy. During the weeks that followed, the prime minister's inclination to negotiate some sort of compromise with a Germany whose victories seemed irreversible were overridden by a defiant queen, backed by a majority of the cabinet; Wilhelmina accepted de Geer's resignation in August. His place was taken by Pieter Gerbrandy, a maverick member of the Anti-

<sup>1</sup> This narrative draws on Louis de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 53–75; see also M. R. D. Foot, ed., *Holland at War against Hitler: Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1940–1945* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), ch. 1.

Revolutionary Party – a conservative Calvinist party supportive of strong central government and historically more open than de Geer’s Christian Historical Union to working across sectarian lines with Catholic parties. Gerbrandy’s voice had been critical in the cabinet’s original decision to decamp to the United Kingdom.

A mix of both highly contingent and structural factors had combined to produce this outcome. Among the contingent elements were the contrasting personalities of Queen Wilhelmina and Prime Minister de Geer. The former was a forceful person whose determination to evade German capture and persistent refusal to contemplate a compromise with the invader was tied to her belief that the monarch was the embodiment of the nation’s sovereignty. Ordinarily finding herself marginalized by the parliamentary system and sidelined from any active role in politics, the crisis of May 1940 created a situation in which her decisions could suddenly have a powerful impact both symbolically and substantively. Not only did she seize that opportunity by the horns, but she hoped to parlay this novel constellation of forces into long-term constitutional reforms that would enhance the executive role of the monarch in post-war Netherlands. These hopes were disappointed, but for the duration of the war, as Louis de Jong has pointed out, the suspension of parliament and the unusual circumstance of politics in exile gave Wilhelmina – in partnership with Prime Minister Gerbrandy – a brief yet decisive position of very substantial influence over governmental decision-making. By the same token, de Geer’s personal loss of nerves in May 1940 allowed Gerbrandy’s arguments in favor of the cabinet’s departure from the country to prevail.

Significant as such personal factors and eleventh-hour decisions were, one of the remarkable aspects of the Dutch response to German occupation was that just such a scenario had been the subject of contingency planning well before the outbreak of war.<sup>2</sup> Enemy occupation was an ordeal the country’s Belgian neighbor had undergone in the First World War, during which the Netherlands had succeeded in maintaining its neutrality. As Hitler’s shadow grew longer over Europe, the Dutch leadership had grown increasingly concerned that their country might not be so fortunate in the event of renewed great-power conflict. In 1937–38, under the premiership of Hendrikus Colijn (the long-time head of the Anti-Revolutionary Party), the government had adopted a set of guidelines – *Aanwijzingen* in Dutch – for the country’s leadership and

<sup>2</sup> On the *Aanwijzingen* resulting from this planning, see Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation, 1940–1945* (New York: Berg, 1988), ch. 2.

civil service in the event the still-neutral Netherlands fell under enemy control. Under such a scenario, the Aanwijzingen called for the relocation of the royal head of state and cabinet to a location in exile, where – just as the Belgian king and cabinet had done from beyond German reach during the First World War – the government’s senior leadership could remain free to conduct diplomacy and cultivate alliance relationships, while also administering the overseas empire in Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. At the same time, the civil service under the leadership of the secretaries-general – the top functionaries in the various ministries – was to remain in place and “*in the interests of the population* [original italics], strive to ensure that the administration, even under the altered conditions, continue to fulfill its task as well as possible.” The italicized phrase introduced a crucial element of conditionality: the framework essentially left it to the bureaucrats to judge at what point their continuation in office was doing more harm than good to the population they were charged with serving.<sup>3</sup>

This approach was based on the formal provisions of international law.<sup>4</sup> Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Convention’s regulations governing wartime occupations stipulated that, “[t]he authority of the legitimate power having in fact passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all the measures in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.”<sup>5</sup> As Eyal Benvenisti has pointed out, the principle underpinning Article 43 was that of military occupation as a sort of stewardship, under the terms of which the official sovereignty of a country’s government would remain intact, while functional authority would be exercised by the occupying forces. The latter would be obliged to enforce the country’s laws subject to the limitations imposed by their own military exigencies. In such circumstances, it made perfect sense for the indigenous civil service, municipal leaders, judges, police officers, etc. to remain on the job while their government continued to defy the invader from exile, pending a final settlement of the conflict. Yet, Benvenisti clarifies, this legal framework assumed the

<sup>3</sup> From the text of the Aanwijzingen, as quoted in Paul Bronzwaer, *Maastricht en Luik bezet: een comparatief onderzoek naar vijf aspecten van de Duitse bezetting van Maastricht en Luik tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), 97–98. My translation.

<sup>4</sup> Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule*, 140–41.

<sup>5</sup> Article 43 of “Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land,” The Hague, October 18, 1907, as posted on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) website, [www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=3741EAB8E36E9274C12563CD00516894](http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=3741EAB8E36E9274C12563CD00516894) (accessed June 30, 2015).

possibility of quite sharply distinguishing the sphere of military interests from the daily functioning of society and economy. This, in turn, was premised on a classically liberal vision of civil society's relative freedom from intrusive governmental intervention and regulation: "The assumption was that the separation of governments from civilians, of public from private interests, would also hold true in times of war." It is questionable whether there ever had been a time or a place in which such clear-cut demarcations between the interests of an occupying army and the rights of a civilian population could have been implemented. In a twentieth-century era of total warfare, the blueprint laid out by Article 43 was aspirational at best.<sup>6</sup> That said, it had the virtue of laying out a potential course of action, recognized as legitimate under international law, to be followed by the governments of small countries vulnerable to wartime occupation by greater powers – hence the logic of the *Aanwijzingen* of 1937.

Thus, while there was a great deal of haphazard, last-minute decision-making that went into the relocation of queen and cabinet to London amidst the chaotic conditions of May 1940, the *Aanwijzingen* constituted a preexisting structural element that helped determine the outcome. Insofar as flight into exile was the default option, the burden fell upon any actual or would-be naysayers to persuade their colleagues that circumstances called for a different response. The fact that most of the country's influential political parties were represented in or at least supported the coalition government meant that there were few credible extra-governmental figures or movements to whom doubters within the cabinet might have turned for support. There was a Dutch Nazi party (NSB – National Socialist Movement), but it was a marginal political force and had been subject to a police crackdown following the outbreak of war in Europe. Finally, the very fact that the small country's conquest proceeded at lightning speed meant that there was no time for second guessing of the government's initial impulse to remove its operations to foreign soil. By the time de Geer did formally seek to revisit the question, his colleagues and he were already in London; the psychological, political, and practical obstacles to reversing course and negotiating a return to the Nazi-occupied Netherlands were all the greater in this context. A subsequent proposal, pushed particularly strongly by the minister of colonies, that the seat of government be transferred to the Dutch East Indies was also successfully resisted by the queen and her allies in the cabinet. By 1941, the government-in-exile's long-term commitment to its wartime alliance

<sup>6</sup> Eyal Benvenisti, *The International Law of Occupation* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 4; quotation on p. 70.

with Britain was hardening. When, in February of that year, de Geer slipped back into German-occupied Europe by way of neutral Portugal, he did so on his own; the government-in-exile immediately denounced his action as “a breach of loyalty and ... an act detrimental to the national interest.”<sup>7</sup> His subsequent effort to initiate the negotiation of a new *modus vivendi* between Dutch society and the occupiers was isolated, ill-timed, and came to nought.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the in-country arrangement loosely delineated in the *Aanwijzingen* was also implemented: the German occupation authorities were happy to coopt the secretaries-general of the Dutch ministries into the country’s administration, and these senior civil servants did initially choose to remain on the job. Insofar as this fell into line with the 1937 contingency plan, it did not constitute a formal inconsistency with the government’s departure. Rather, the resulting arrangement was supposed to reflect a patriotically coherent division of functions. On the one hand, the bureaucratic apparatus remained in place to coordinate the provision of vital services to the Dutch population amidst the strain of enemy occupation. This role, on the other hand, was complemented by that of a defiant monarch and cabinet responsible for upholding the nation’s honor, sovereignty, and long-term interests by remaining technically at war with Germany, commanding the loyalty of the Dutch overseas empire, coordinating the evolving alliance with Britain, and awaiting an eventual return to a place of honor in Europe following the hoped-for defeat of Germany.

### France

The German conquest of the Netherlands was, of course, the opening stage of a campaign of which the principal objective was the defeat of France (with Belgium and Luxembourg swallowed up *en passant*). And the Fall of France did indeed follow notoriously quickly – in the space of six weeks. Yet six weeks is a great deal longer than the four days of Dutch armed resistance. Moreover, as a great power that had – with the support of its British allies – succeeded in confining the German advance to the northeast of the country for the bulk of the First World War and that had subsequently invested significant resources in the construction of high-tech defensive works in the form of the Maginot Line, France had not made political contingency plans for a military rout. Hence, as the military

<sup>7</sup> “A Broken Pledge: Former Dutch Leader’s Return to Holland,” *The Times* (London), February 7, 1941, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian F. Manning, “The Position of the Dutch Government in London up to 1942,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 1978), 117–35.

situation deteriorated, the French government faced the prospect of a German occupation without a prearranged blueprint for action, yet with more time than their Dutch counterparts had had in which to debate the pros and cons of, and waver among, various possible scenarios.<sup>9</sup>

As the French prime minister, Paul Reynaud, departed from Paris towards the southwest along with the rest of his cabinet on June 10, 1940, four days before the entry of German troops into the capital, the recent Dutch precedent actually figured among the various courses of action he was contemplating. With German forces moving relentlessly forward, millions of terrified French citizens had taken flight amidst chaotic and dangerous conditions. The roads were crammed with refugees, laden with all the belongings they could manage to pile into cars, or on to carts, or to carry on their persons. The long lines of desperate women, children, and old men, as well as retreating French soldiers, were the objects of periodic strafing attacks by German aircraft.<sup>10</sup> Public services were in utter disarray. Organized military resistance had disintegrated. To the north, allied British forces had been evacuated from Dunkirk by June 4. For his part, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, prudently refused to throw those elements of the Royal Air Force thus far held in reserve into a campaign that had already been lost. Under these dire circumstances, what course of action should France's leaders – refugees themselves, having initially relocated just south of the Loire, then on to Bordeaux on June 14 – pursue?

Reynaud's personal inclination was to continue the retreat to a location beyond metropolitan France, whence the struggle could be resumed. Like the Netherlands, France had overseas colonies that, at least for the time being, remained well out of reach of German forces. France also had a large navy that could steam out of harm's way to fight another day. Given the possibility of falling back on these resources, Reynaud argued, the military defeat in the Hexagon should be seen as the loss of a battle and not of the war. He cited the Dutch example as a precedent the French government could follow.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The sources on which I draw for this narrative include: Philip Nord, *France 1940: Defending the Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), ch. 5; Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 1996; first published 1993), ch. 1; Philip Charles Farwell Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil–Military Relations in Modern France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), ch. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Dombrowski Risser, *France under Fire: German Invasion, Civilian Flight, and Family Survival during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 124–32.

<sup>11</sup> Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122.

Yet the personal and structural elements that had favored this outcome in the Dutch case were lacking in France. Unlike its Dutch counterpart, which was for all intents and purposes a national unity government, Reynaud's recently formed cabinet was an incohesive, socialist-backed, centrist coalition – the latest in a series of formations cobbled together to replace the collapsed center-left Popular Front bloc, whose 1936 electoral victory had left the French right fuming.<sup>12</sup> Seeking to fashion a broader basis for consensus amidst the nation's existential crisis, Reynaud had, in the third week of May, appointed the right-wing hero of the 1916 Battle of Verdun – the octogenarian Marshal Philippe Pétain – as vice-premier. In light of the country's catastrophic military setbacks, Reynaud also dismissed the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General Maurice Gamelin – an officer who had maintained a reputation for being scrupulously apolitical. His 73-year-old replacement, General Maxime Weygand, had throughout his career – ever since his early days as an anti-Dreyfusard – been known for his ill-concealed hostility to liberal-democratic values and institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than helping bolster right-wing support for his position, Reynaud's reshuffling of appointments only served to leave him politically exposed. For, instead of putting ideological differences aside and rallying behind the prime minister's pro-war position, Weygand and Pétain proved strong advocates of seeking terms with the enemy. Weygand's operational approach had effectively laid the ground for this startling development. After having vainly attempted, during his first week in command, to implement his predecessor's latest plan for a counterattack, Weygand had gone on to pour resources into a last-ditch effort to establish and hold a defensive line north of Paris. He refused to plan, or hold forces in reserve for, a strategic withdrawal to North Africa. As this honorable-seeming yet futile stance came to nought and the government was compelled to flee its own capital, it was Weygand who emerged as the most forceful and vehement advocate of negotiating an armistice. When Reynaud proposed that the army in the field capitulate while the government moved out of the country, Weygand responded with outrage, choosing to take this as an assault on the honor of the military. In the cabinet's June 16, 1940 deliberations, Pétain seconded this position, arguing that the patriotic duty of France's leadership was to remain in place and do its best to negotiate an armistice that would alleviate the suffering of the French people. To depart the metropole

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Pierre Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation, 1938–1944*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29–30.

<sup>13</sup> Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand*, *passim*.

would, he suggested, constitute an act of desertion rather than an expression of patriotism.<sup>14</sup> A majority of the French cabinet – including two notional political allies whom he had appointed as part of his reshuffle – had by now veered away from Reynaud's approach. Rather than succeeding in coopting the Right, Reynaud had backed himself into a corner in his own government. At the June 16 meeting, cabinet members poured cold water on Reynaud's enthusiasm for Whitehall's last-minute offer (engineered by Jean Monnet and Charles de Gaulle in London) of a Franco-Britannic political union – intended as a mark of the United Kingdom's commitment to the ultimate liberation of France. One minister (Jean Ybarnegaray) remarked that he preferred to see France transformed into a Nazi province than into a British dominion.<sup>15</sup> The isolated prime minister resigned that very day. His recently appointed deputy – Marshal Pétain – took his place as prime minister and moved immediately to open armistice talks with the German armed forces.

Contributing to this outcome was not just the fractious legacy of interwar France's deep political divisions in general, but the longstanding politicization of many among the military's officer corps in particular. The nominal political neutrality of figures such as Weygand and Pétain was belied by their sympathies and connections with networks and movements that had sought to undermine the French Republic during political flashpoints in the 1930s. More importantly, as Philip Bankwitz has argued, Maxime Weygand was among those who saw the army as the purest institutional distillation of the nation. The mass-conscription military, in this view, embodied a quality of national unity and discipline which stood in stark contrast to the ideological divisions and factionalized interest-group politics that characterized parliamentary democracy. Hence, for such officers, "conditional obedience ... lay under the official edifice of unquestioning allegiance" to civilian authority.<sup>16</sup> If forced to choose between deferring to the authority of a republican government and upholding the honor of the military, the latter would take precedence over the former. That is why Weygand chose to challenge Reynaud's position rather than seek a way of implementing his policy in June 1940. From Weygand's perspective, "the army was ... the Nation," as Bankwitz puts it. For the army to capitulate while the government relocated would serve, not to uphold the principle of national sovereignty, but to betray

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 122–23. See also Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 101–6.

<sup>15</sup> William Fortescue, *The Third Republic in France, 1870–1940: Conflicts and Continuities* (London: Routledge, 2000), 235.

<sup>16</sup> Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand*, 214.



the nation on behalf of a regime whose inherent flaws – Weygand and Pétain were convinced – had brought the country to this pass in the first place. The possibility that the military’s own strategic and tactical shortcomings might have contributed to the debacle was, of course, not something the likes of a Weygand was willing to contemplate.<sup>17</sup>

The dynamics of the French civil–military relationship contrasted sharply with the Dutch case. Not only had the Netherlands’ pre-war politics been characterized by strong centrist coalitions, leaving far Left and Right relatively marginalized, but its officer corps was not alienated from the country’s constitutional order. At the decisive hour, the Dutch commander-in-chief, General Winkelman, was completely cooperative in the implementation of his government’s instructions, continuing military resistance for a couple of days following the queen and cabinet’s departure for London, and then capitulating once the situation became completely hopeless. One can also hypothesize that, along with the less troubled history of civil–military relations in the Netherlands, the fact that Holland was a tiny power compared with Germany made the reality of defeat and the prospect of capitulation less difficult to swallow for the Dutch officer corps than for their French counterparts.

Perhaps if France had had a constitutional monarch pushing for a pursuit of the Dutch scenario, a politically reactionary military commander such as Weygand might have proved less obdurate. But as a mere prime minister – and a politically enfeebled one at that – Reynaud simply did not have the sacral aura of legitimacy that still surrounded royalty in the eyes of some French officers. (Nor, evidently, did the country’s formal head of state, President Albert Lebrun, who supported Reynaud’s position and was subsequently prevented by the Vichy regime from departing for North Africa.) In fact, according to Marc Ferro, Weygand made the contrast explicitly to Reynaud during a heated personal exchange on June 15: “What analogy can there be between the queen of the Netherlands who represents her country over which the dynasty reigns from father to son, and a prime minister, given that the Republic has known a hundred of them in the course of seventy years?”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., chs. 6 and 8; quotation on p. 318. The commanders of the French navy and air force had been much more open to the idea of continuing the war from overseas, but their position was completely undercut by Pétain’s June 17, 1940 radio broadcast announcing that he had contacted the Germans with a request for “honorable” armistice terms and that the time for combat was over. Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l’an 40, Vol. II: Ouvriers et soldats* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 681–82.

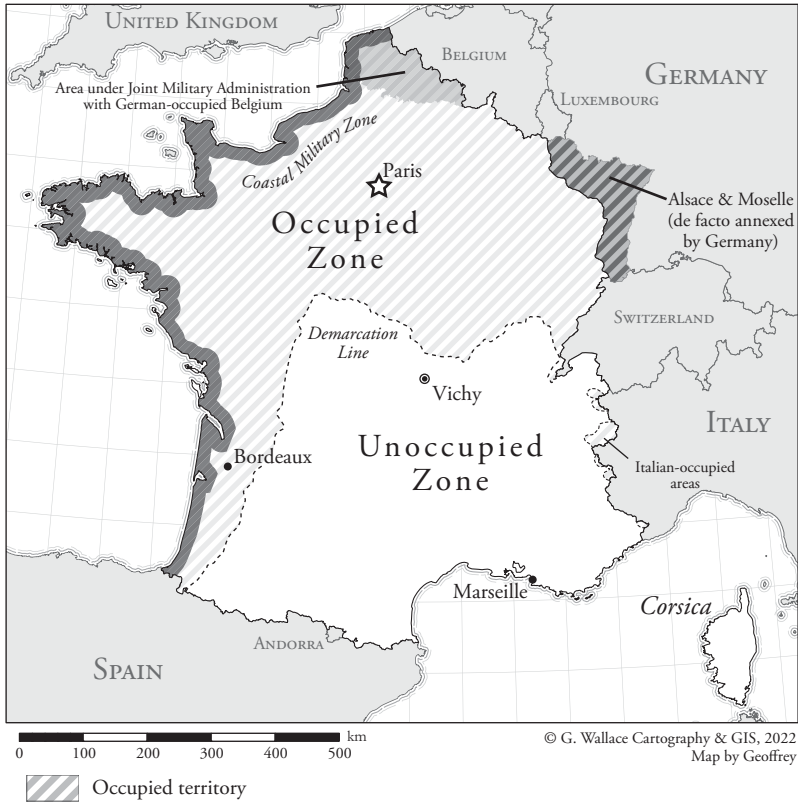
<sup>18</sup> Marc Ferro, *Pétain* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 79–80. See also Burrin, *France under the Germans*, 7.

In post-war retrospect, it is easy to paint Reynaud's position as the nobly patriotic one, while decrying the armistice as an act of craven spinelessness at best or treacherous opportunism – in light of Pétain's subsequent consolidation of authoritarian power – at worst. Yet, at the time, in a country that had undergone the horrendous bloodletting of the First World War only to win a Pyrrhic victory in 1918, there was a receptive audience for the argument that the most patriotic option under the circumstances of June 1940 was to cut an interim deal with the Germans. This would spare France the horrors of continued warfare, allow the horde of refugees crowding the country's roads a chance to return home, and hopefully give the nation an opportunity to recover its strength under some form of continued political sovereignty in a German-dominated Europe. Pétain, Weygand, and their allies played these cards effectively, turning the tables on Reynaud's patriotic rationale. As far as they were concerned, for France's leaders to leave the country amidst the appalling crisis and impending occupation its citizens faced would constitute an abandonment of their posts and a betrayal of their patriotic duty.

In the event, Pétain's government was able, in a matter of days, to negotiate armistice terms that appeared on the surface to be surprisingly generous, all things being relative. Precisely because, at the time of their military defeat in the Hexagon, the French still held the card of their overseas colonies (and hence the option of deploying their colonial and naval resources in a continued war alongside Britain), the Germans had a strong incentive to grant Pétain terms that he could live with. It was in keen awareness of this leverage remaining in the hands of the French government that the Germans offered a peculiar arrangement, unparalleled during the Second World War, designed to meet Pétain's minimal desiderata for an "honorable" armistice: the southeastern two-fifths of France were left unoccupied and under the direct control of the French government, which set up its headquarters and rehoused ministerial staffs in the hotel-rich spa town of Vichy. The Germans at this juncture made no bid for control or seizure of any part of the French empire or fleet. Technically, the Vichy government was also sovereign over the German-held three-fifths of the country, apart from the region of Alsace-Lorraine, which was *de facto* annexed by Germany.<sup>19</sup> This arrangement lasted precisely as long as France's main, implicit bargaining chip – its North African colonies – remained out of Allied grasp, which is to say until November 1942.

The immediate sense of material and psychological relief that the Franco-German armistice brought for millions of French citizens, for

<sup>19</sup> Ferro, *Pétain*, 97–99.



Map 3 Vichy France, mid-1942.

whom the prospect of a war continued from overseas would have brought little solace amidst the relentless tramp of German boots, seemed to validate Pétain's course. The marshal was able to claim success in having preserved a certain measure of French autonomy from direct German control in the unoccupied southeast, even as he arrogated extraordinary powers to himself on the French domestic stage. On July 10, 1940, the French Third Republic's national assembly (minus the Communists, who had been banned in 1939, and more than two dozen deputies who had departed on board the *Massilia* for North Africa, where they were detained [see p. 30]) convened in Vichy for the first and last time, to vote in overwhelming numbers, 569 to 80 with 17 abstentions, in favor of granting Pétain special authority to draft a new constitution. It was fitting that the setting for this political wager was the Vichy casino.

Pétain interpreted the law as immediately suspending the existing constitution. He adjourned the very national assembly that had empowered him and issued a series of acts that replaced the republic with a “French state” in which most powers were formally concentrated in his own person as head of state.<sup>20</sup> Over the months and years that followed, the Vichy regime effected a paradigm shift away from the liberal-democratic norms of the Third Republic in favor of a repressive, antisemitic authoritarianism that seemed to straddle the boundary between pseudo-monarchist reaction and fascism.

To the extent that historians have been able to document public opinion during the early phases of the Vichy era, it seems to have ranged from enthusiastic support of Pétain to passive acquiescence, with only a small minority vehemently opposed to the new dispensation. Even the Communists adhered to a cautiously fence-sitting stance at this juncture, given the Soviet Union’s effective alliance with Nazi Germany. The most notable exception, of course, was Charles de Gaulle. Reynaud’s final cabinet reshuffle on June 5 had brought the recently promoted general into the government as undersecretary of war. De Gaulle’s opposition to an armistice had remained unwavering in the face of Reynaud’s political collapse; the day after Reynaud’s resignation, de Gaulle had flown from Bordeaux to London with a view to finding some way of continuing the fight in the name of a France whose government was negotiating armistice terms with Germany. In his second radio broadcast directed at his fellow citizens, carried by the BBC on June 22, 1940, the principles he invoked on behalf of his stance were those of “honor, good sense, and the higher interest [*intérêt supérieure*] of the fatherland.”<sup>21</sup> In speaking of honor, he referred not – as Weygand had in his confrontations with Reynaud – to the military as an institution the dignity of which must be protected at all costs, but to the obligation of the entire nation, whose government had undertaken, in a mutual commitment with Britain, that neither party would break ranks with the other. (In fact, de Gaulle had played a key role in persuading the British cabinet to reject an initial June 15 request by the French cabinet for London’s acquiescence in a French exploration of armistice possibilities. The offer, instead, of a Franco-British union had been strongly encouraged by de Gaulle as a way of strengthening Reynaud’s hand.) Good sense, he argued, suggested that the war was actually far from lost, given the overseas and allied resources

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 132–36.

<sup>21</sup> Charles de Gaulle, “L’appel du 22 juin 1940,” [www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1940-1944-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale/l-appel-du-18-juin/documents/l-appel-du-22-juin-1940.php](http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1940-1944-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale/l-appel-du-18-juin/documents/l-appel-du-22-juin-1940.php) (accessed July 28, 2015).

still available to France over the longer haul. As to the higher interest of the fatherland, de Gaulle contended (presciently as it turned out) that this was but the beginning of a world war in which the combined resources of those countries that ended up ranged against Germany would ultimately prevail. It would ill-serve the national interest to respond to France's continental defeat by detaching the country from the potential victors of a prospectively global conflict. He called on French people everywhere, of whatever background, but especially those with military experience, to affiliate themselves with his effort to continue the struggle over the long haul. He pointed to the examples of the other governments-in-exile in London (Polish, Dutch, etc.) by way of trying to shame his compatriots over their own government's decision to accept defeat and strike a devil's bargain with the enemy.

Yet the fact was that at this early juncture, it was de Gaulle who did not have any credible claim to legitimacy as a representative of the French nation. Pétain's regime denounced him as a traitor who was defying his sovereign government's authority (and that, incidentally, of his erstwhile military superior and mentor – Pétain) and seeking to aggrandize himself at the cost of his nation's interests. De Gaulle's early radio broadcasts were, notoriously, heard by very few of his fellow citizens; fewer still had any inclination to embrace his rejectionist stance at that juncture. For the Vichy government, and likely for a majority of those citizens who were initially even aware of de Gaulle's stance, it was the general's rejectionism that constituted foolhardiness at best and betrayal at worst; support for Marshal Pétain represented the patriotic course to take under the tragic circumstances of the summer of 1940. Among the country's new leadership, the belief was strongly avowed (perhaps with overtones of defensiveness?) that staying in France to negotiate an armistice and share in the suffering of the nation was the honorable and patriotic thing to do. Writing to his wife about the twenty-seven oppositionist parliamentarians who embarked aboard the *Massilia* on June 21 to sail for North Africa, Admiral Darlan – who had made arrangements for the parliamentarians' voyage in the first place – poured scorn on them as cowards who were simply abandoning the French people in order to save their own skins.<sup>22</sup>

On July 3, the British government appeared to play into the hands of the newly established Vichy regime by attacking the French naval

<sup>22</sup> Ferro, *Pétain*, 94–94. Following their arrival in North Africa, the parliamentarians were arrested and sent back to France for eventual trial, after a retroactive decision by Pétain and his government that their departure – which he had originally authorized – constituted desertion of duty. Richard J. Champoux, "The Massilia Affair," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 1975), 283–300.

squadron at Mers el-Kebir, Algeria, after its commander refused to accept British demands that he, at the very least, remove his ships from the Mediterranean theater under British escort, lest they ultimately fall into German hands. Almost 1,300 French sailors perished at the hands of their recent allies, and Vichy was quick to seize upon the opportunity to wrap itself in the mantle of patriotic self-righteousness. The breaking of France's commitments to Britain could be justified retroactively by pointing to the perfidy of Albion.

And yet, Mers el-Kebir notwithstanding, the one potential advantage de Gaulle did have precisely by virtue of his immediate decision to reject the armistice, and which he would later parlay into a legitimization of his own position at the expense of Vichy's, was that he could claim to have unwaveringly adhered to the path of national honor. It is, after all, an ironic quality of honor that its course is best recognized when it diverges most starkly from the immediate, material interests of nation and individual alike, but that it is most widely followed when it appears to converge with that of physical or political self-preservation.

Among the French, then, two rival claims to patriotic legitimacy emerged from the moment armistice talks began.<sup>23</sup> Each of the claimants invoked similar values as foundational to their very different perceptions of where true patriotic north lay: it is striking that de Gaulle's triad of honor, common sense, and higher interest of the fatherland was echoed (minus the common sense) by Weygand after the war, when he wrote that, for the French army, "‘honor’ and the ‘higher interest of the country’ form a ‘single word.’"<sup>24</sup> But their understandings of what political choices honor dictated and what constituted the long-term national interest under the extreme circumstances of June 1940 were radically and irreconcilably different.<sup>25</sup> That said, as will be discussed below, there was an initial period when this rift appeared marginal and inconsequential, in light of the overwhelming combination of French support for, and passivity or acquiescence in, Vichy's version of patriotism.

It is nonetheless worth underlining the contrast between France's situation and that of the Netherlands, the national authorities of which –

<sup>23</sup> See Denis Peschanski, "Legitimacy/Legitimation/Delegitimation: France in the Dark Years, a Textbook Case," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (November 2004), 409–23.

<sup>24</sup> Weygand as paraphrased and quoted in Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand*, 210.

<sup>25</sup> Julian Jackson frames the dichotomy a little differently, contrasting Pétain's "decision to remain on French soil to defend his compatriots, to defend French lives, while de Gaulle left France to defend what he later called his 'idea of France' ... 'Honour' or 'life' – protecting an 'idea' of France or protecting (or believing that one was protecting) the French – that was the nub of the conflict between Pétain and de Gaulle in 1940." Julian Jackson, *De Gaulle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 120–21.

queen and cabinet, on the one hand, and senior civil servants, on the other – were initially able to establish a division of functions that allowed the symbolic and institutional infrastructure of patriotic legitimacy to remain notionally intact by virtue of the very fact that its components were geographically redistributed. In setting about the business of establishing working relationships with the Germans, the Dutch secretaries-general were not flouting the authority of queen and government; for their part, in relocating to London and cementing the alliance with Britain, Wilhelmina and her cabinet were not calling into question the loyalty of the civil service in the occupied homeland. The Dutch approach assumed that the demands of patriotic honor and the higher interest of the fatherland could not, in the context of wartime occupation, be reduced to a single, undifferentiated political posture to be followed by all elements of government and society. This very embrace of, not just distinct and complementary, but radically different and seemingly contradictory, roles to be played by government and bureaucratic apparatus facilitated the survival, for the time being, of the myth of patriotic solidarity in the face of devastating military defeat and occupation.

### Denmark

In Denmark, a country that had historically followed a course of neutrality and had signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in May 1939, military resistance to the German invasion on April 9, 1940, took a token form that lasted just a few hours. For the Germans, Denmark was a stepping stone *en route* to their main target of Norway, and from the Danish government's perspective, serious armed resistance in the face of overwhelming German superiority was quite pointless. The government was able to negotiate terms that left it with a substantive degree of autonomy under German occupation. For the Nazis, in whose racial classification system the Danes qualified as their equals and who did not perceive any immediate geo-strategic need for expending large amounts of resources and manpower on the country's occupation, Danish autonomy was the path of least resistance (so to speak). By the same token, for Denmark's political elite, accommodation (or "negotiation," as they preferred to term it) was the obvious political choice to make, given the relatively liberal terms on offer from Berlin. Head of state (king), cabinet, and civil service alike accordingly remained in place, abiding by the terms of the armistice. This may not have been a heroic stance to adopt, but integration on comparatively favorable terms into the German-run European war economy certainly contributed to the country's relative prosperity during the first couple of years of

occupation, while ordinary citizens continued to have a national government representing them in their society's interactions with the German occupation authorities.<sup>26</sup>

### Thailand

In the East and Southeast Asian theaters, it is Thailand that lends itself most readily to comparison with this part's three Western European cases. Of all the countries that fell in their territorial entirety to Japanese control during the war, Thailand was the only one that had been a fully independent state before the war – the only one with national sovereignty to lose. The Kingdom of Siam, as it had until very recently been known, had remained free of European colonial rule thanks in part to its geographical position, wedged as it was between French-ruled Indochina to its east and British-controlled Burma to its west. The diplomatic agility of its late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century monarchs had enabled them to parlay this delicate situation to their advantage by playing the two European imperial powers off against one another, ultimately enabling their kingdom to take on the role of buffer zone between the British and French spheres of control. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Siamese kings also sought to shore up their nominally absolute authority by beginning to cultivate some of the infrastructural, institutional, educational, and political-cultural features of a modern state and society. These features included, of course, a sense of nationalism, which government initiatives sought to inculcate among the educated strata of the country's population.<sup>27</sup>

As with many other countries experiencing transformative change amidst an intensely competitive and inherently perilous international environment, Siam's fitful experiments with modernization led to internal crises of expectation and legitimacy, and generated bitter struggles over power and resources among social elites. As has so often been the case in the modern era, these conflicts tended to manifest themselves in the form of clashes over the nature, meaning, and political implications of national identity and patriotic sentiment. In a pattern familiar from other cases around the world, the Siamese monarchy's

<sup>26</sup> Henrik Dethlefsen, "Denmark and the German Occupation," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 15, no. 3 (1990), 193–206.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 3; Ja Ian Chong, *External Intervention and the Politics of State Formation: China, Indonesia, and Thailand, 1893–1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 8; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).



attempt to shore up its domestic and international power and authority by cultivating an educated elite, building up modern military and bureaucratic apparatuses, and encouraging a sense of national pride had left it vulnerable to challenges to its authority in the name of some of the very modernizing ideas and values it had sought to instill. A rising generation of military officers and civil servants, many of them educated abroad, chafed at the continued monopolization of substantive power and privileged access to choice positions by members of the traditional royal and aristocratic elites.<sup>28</sup> In 1932, a coalition of these figures, organized into the People's Party, seized power in a nearly bloodless coup. Consolidating its position and expanding its ranks in the face of royalist counter-coup attempts over the following few years, the People's Party did not abolish the monarchy, but did away with royal absolutism in favor of a new constitutional order. The reigning monarch departed the country and abdicated in 1935. The new king was his nine-year-old nephew, who was at school in Switzerland and remained abroad for the following decade, apart from one visit to his homeland in 1938. A regency council was created to stand in for the new king during his absence.<sup>29</sup>

While the establishment of parliamentary democracy was nominally the People's Party's objective, during a "transitional" period the new national assembly remained half appointed by the government itself and half selected through indirect elections. Efforts to form competing political parties were blocked, trade-union activism was suppressed, and press freedoms were severely curtailed. In a country with a population that still consisted overwhelmingly of peasants, the newly empowered elite continued to resort to top-down methods in their efforts to accelerate the modernization which had been initiated by Siam's absolutist rulers. In January 1939, the leading military figure in the People's Party, known as Phibun Songkhram, who had recently risen from defence minister to the position of prime minister, further consolidated the new order's power through a bloody purge of oppositional elements. At the same time, the People's Party remained vulnerable to internal dissension. The most significant fracture divided those associated with Phibun and the military from the associates and followers of the leading civilian figure in the People's Party, Pridi Banomyong. Phibun dominated the cabinet from 1939 until 1944, serving as prime minister while also usually holding other key portfolios such as foreign affairs and defence. Yet Pridi had enough of a following to retain a voice in public affairs in one capacity or another – be

<sup>28</sup> Baker and Phongpaichit, *History of Thailand*, 95–98 and ch. 5.      <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

it in the cabinet as finance minister or, from 1942, as member of the regency council.<sup>30</sup>

As discussed below, Phibun's ideological outlook shifted towards a fascist orientation over the course of the late 1930s and early 1940s, as he cultivated closer ties with Japan. Pridi was generally seen as more liberal politically and more closely aligned with the British, who had long exercised considerable economic and political influence in the country. It was on Phibun's initiative that Siam was officially renamed Thailand in 1938 – a change that reflected his regime's efforts to identify the state with the ethno-national identity ascribed to its core population as well as to a variety of "related" ethnic groups in neighboring colonies – notably French-ruled Laos and Cambodia and British-controlled Burma – to which Siam had been forced to cede lands in earlier decades. During the period of October 1940 to January 1941, Phibun took advantage of the Fall of France and the Japanese occupation of northern Indochina in September 1940 to press territorial claims against Laos and Cambodia by attacking Vichy-affiliated French colonial forces. Following a setback at sea at the hands of French naval forces, he appealed to the Japanese (whose occupying forces in northern Indochina had kept the French administration intact under their aegis) for mediation. This resulted in the cession of some border provinces – a smaller gain than Phibun had hoped for, but one that he could still tout as a victory for Thai nationalism.<sup>31</sup>

As E. Bruce Reynolds has pointed out, this did not mean Phibun was entirely complacent over the prospect of unfettered Japanese regional domination. Rather, his diplomacy during 1941 can be seen as a variation on his predecessors' tried-and-true approach of playing a delicate and adroit balancing act between rival regional hegemonies. While he was happy to exploit Japan's eagerness for political inroads in Thailand in the context of his border war with the French, this did not prevent him from repeatedly extending feelers to the British and the Americans over the possibility of some sort of security guarantee against an expansionist Japan. In the end, the British were too overstretched and the Americans too skeptical to oblige, leaving Phibun with little choice but to negotiate some sort of understanding with the Japanese, whose occupation of the remainder of French Indochina in July 1941 marked the

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> This discussion of diplomatic history draws heavily on E. Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance, 1940–1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), chs. 2–4; Judith A. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand: A Story of Intrigue* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), ch. 10. See also Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 50–55.

beginning of the final descent towards war in the Pacific and Southeast Asian theaters. Phibun ended up effectively acquiescing to the prospect of Japanese forces moving across Thai territory in the event they carried out their planned invasion of British-held Malaya and Burma, while vainly seeking reassurances that the incursion would be limited to peripheral provinces rather than moving directly into Bangkok itself.<sup>32</sup>

In the event, Phibun contrived to be away from the capital on December 7, 1941, as Japanese diplomats sought to present him with their formal demand for free military passage in the hours before the onset of the Pacific War. This left the Thai army in the position of following its standing orders to resist any violation of the country's borders. The several hours of armed clashes that ensued could be used to establish – in the eyes of domestic and foreign audiences alike – that Thai soldiers had acted honorably on behalf of their nation, within the limits of their capabilities. The show of armed opposition might also leave open a path back to understanding with the British in case the Japanese proved unsuccessful in their overall campaign.<sup>33</sup> By the morning of December 8, Phibun had reappeared in Bangkok, where he gained his cabinet's approval for an acquiescence in the minimal option on offer from the Japanese: Thai authorities would accommodate the transit of Japanese troops through the country, while Tokyo continued to respect Thailand's formal sovereignty and neutrality – and leave the Thai military intact and autonomous. For Phibun, the latter was a crucial point: not only was the military his central power base, but he also held it up as the institutional embodiment of national dignity. In this respect, his priorities bear comparison with those of Weygand and Pétain (in 1940), for whom the prospect of allowing the military – the distillation of all that was best in the nation, by their lights – to endure the humiliation of outright capitulation in metropolitan France as a consequence of a cabinet decision to continue the war from overseas would have constituted a betrayal rather than an affirmation of patriotic duty.<sup>34</sup>

Just three days later, following the stunning sinking by Japanese aircraft of the British warships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* near Singapore, Phibun took the personal decision to accept the Japanese offer of a formal alliance – a move for which approval by the assembly was facilitated by the promise of further territorial compensation to Thailand, this time at

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Reynolds notes that Thai forces also fired on Burma-based British troops seeking to move across the border to take preemptive control of a Thai airfield. *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 4.; Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 218–25; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932–1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47–49.

the expense of the British in Burma and Malaya. This was followed on January 25, 1942, by Thailand's declaration of war against Britain and the United States, in conformity with the country's new alliance obligations. (Washington chose to ignore the declaration rather than responding in kind.)

The abandonment of Thailand's traditional neutrality was much more controversial among the country's elites than had been the terms of the initial ceasefire. The backlash led to the inception of a Free Thai (Seri Thai) movement among émigrés as well as in-country. Throughout this period, the king remained in Switzerland, where his person could serve as a source of potential legitimization for rival understandings of Thai patriotism and national interest. Thus, even as Phibun began an unprecedented effort to consolidate a radically uniform, militant conception of Thai patriotism that was notionally compatible with Japan's vision for a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, alternative loci of patriotic legitimacy lay in the wings, ready to be used as springboards for challenges to that vision in the event that Phibun's bet on Japanese victory in the wider conflict failed to pay off.