CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICS OF AN ALLIANCE
FINLAND IN NAZI FOREIGN POLICY AND WAR STRATEGY

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It sometimes serves the historian well to begin at the end, if only for the sake of illustrating a point more forcefully (and all too obviously with the historian’s luxury of hindsight): when Nazi Germany’s relationships with its central allies on the Eastern Front, Finland and Romania, collapsed in the late summer of 1944, the actual dismantling of the bilateral affairs could hardly have been more different. While the German minister to Helsinki, the conservative career diplomat Wipert von Blücher, and his military counterpart at the Finnish High Command, liaison general Waldemar Erfurth, were courteously escorted out of the country, Germany’s chief diplomatic representative in Bucharest, the former Freikorps leader and Nazi politician Manfred von Killinger, committed suicide against the backdrop of an escalating military confrontation between German and Romanian forces, which rapidly descended into one of the most bitterly fought campaigns of World War II’s final stages.

My subsequent remarks will argue that this apparent dissimilarity is already foreshadowed by Berlin’s relations with Helsinki compared to those with Bucharest in the preceding years, virtually right from the outset of Hitler’s coalition-building efforts in 1940–41. By occasional, though by no means systematic comparative reference to Romania, I will take up and reconsider the case for Finnish exceptionalism during World War II—a case which has recently come under rather heavy and sustained fire in both Finnish and international historiography, so much so that some tend to regard it as effectively buried.¹ I will develop my line of reasoning largely based on a close reading of German policy

¹ The tendency has been apparent in recent Finnish scholarship on the issue of Finland’s involvement in the brutalized war in the east; cf., as the most densely argued example, Oula Silvennoinen, Salaiset aseveljet: Suomen ja Saksan turvallisuuspoliisiyhteistyö 1933–1944 (Helsinki, 2008); for a comprehensive overview of the debate see
on Finland and the position of Finland in Nazi war strategy during the crucial period between 1940–41 and the dissolution of German-Finnish relations in early September 1944. As a result of this, my methodological approach rests principally upon the history of the bilateral relations, of German policy on Finland and the analysis of the development (or lack thereof) of Hitler’s war strategy. References to Finland’s domestic conditions, its wartime society, politics, culture and economy, will have to be kept to a relative minimum.

I. The Formation of an Alliance, 1940–41

Frozen Relations: The Winter War

The Finnish-Soviet Winter War of 1939–40 brought German-Finnish relations close to breaking point. Hitler’s foreign policy during that crucial period was entirely indebted to the premises of his pact with Stalin, which Ribbentrop and Molotov had signed on the eve of what became World War II. In the Pact’s now infamous secret additional protocol, Eastern Europe, with its numerous small- to middle-sized states, had been carved up into so-called spheres of interest—“in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement,” of which the Soviet Union was to include the Baltic States and Finland.2 As German-Soviet relations intensified, with a number of commercial treaties adding substance to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation of 28 September 1939, Finland and indeed the whole of Eastern Europe temporarily disappeared from Berlin’s foreign political and short-term strategic radar. During the Moscow negotiations in the autumn of 1939 and in the months after the onset of the Soviet invasion on 30 November 1939, Finland was effectively abandoned by Berlin and its uncompromising—and implicitly pro-Soviet—neutrality course. To Finland’s largely conservative and robustly anti-Bolshevist elites and the country’s
