The invasion of Poland (September campaign, Polish: Kampania wrześniowa, 1939 defensive war, Polish: Wojna obronna 1939 roku, Poland campaign, German: Polenfeldzug), marked the beginning of World War II. The German invasion began on 1 September 1939, one week after the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviets invaded Poland on 17 September. The campaign ended on 6 October with Germany and the Soviet Union dividing and annexing the whole of Poland under the terms of the German–Soviet Frontier Treaty.

German forces invaded Poland from the north, south, and west the morning after the Gleiwitz incident. Slovak military forces advanced alongside the Germans in northern Slovakia. As the Wehrmacht advanced, Polish forces withdrew from their forward bases of operation close to the Germany–Poland border to more established defense lines to the east. After the mid-September Polish defeat in the Battle of the Bzura, the Germans gained an undisputed advantage. Polish forces then withdrew to the southeast where they prepared for a long defence of the Romanian Bridgehead and awaited expected support and relief from France and the United Kingdom. Those two countries had pacts with Poland and had declared war on Germany on 3 September; in the end their aid to Poland was very limited, however France invaded a small part of Germany in the Saar Offensive.

On 17 September, the Soviet Red Army invaded Eastern Poland, the territory beyond the Curzon Line that fell into the Soviet "sphere of influence" according to the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact; this rendered the Polish plan of defence obsoleteFacing a second front, the Polish government concluded the defence of the Romanian Bridgehead was no longer feasible and ordered an emergency evacuation of all troops to neutral Romania. On 6 October, following the Polish defeat at the Battle of Kock, German and Soviet forces gained full control over Poland. The success of the invasion marked the end of the Second Polish Republic, though Poland never formally surrendered.

On 8 October, after an initial period of military administration, Germany directly annexed western Poland and the former Free City of Danzig and placed the remaining block of territory under the administration of the newly established General Government. The Soviet Union incorporated its newly acquired areas into its constituent Byelorussian and Ukrainian republics, and immediately started a campaign of Sovietization. In the aftermath of the invasion, a collective of underground resistance organizations formed the Polish Underground State within the territory of the former Polish state. Many of the military exiles that managed to escape Poland subsequently joined the Polish Armed Forces in the West, an armed force loyal to the Polish government-in-exile.

Hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians were killed during the September invasion of Poland and millions more were killed in the following years of German and Soviet occupation. The Polish Campaign was the first action by Adolf Hitler in his attempt to create Lebensraum (living space) for Germans. Nazi propaganda was one of the factors behind the German brutality directed at civilians which had worked relentlessly to convince the German people into believing that the Jews and Slavs were Untermenschen (subhumans).

Starting from the first day of invasion, the German air force (the Luftwaffe) attacked civilian targets and columns of refugees along the roads to terrorize the Polish people, disrupt communications, and target Polish morale. The Luftwaffe killed 6,000–7,000 Polish civilians during the bombing of Warsaw.

The German invasion saw atrocities committed against Polish men, women, and children. The German forces (both SS and the regular Wehrmacht) murdered tens of thousands of Polish civilians (e.g. the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler was notorious throughout the campaign for burning villages[106] and committing atrocities in numerous Polish towns, including massacres in Błonie, Złoczew, Bolesławiec, Torzeniec, Goworowo, Mława, and Włocławek).

During Operation Tannenberg, an ethnic cleansing campaign organized by multiple elements of the German government, tens of thousands of Polish civilians were shot at 760 mass execution sites by the Einsatzgruppen.

Altogether, the civilian losses of Polish population amounted to about 150,000–200,000.[108] Roughly 1,250 German civilians were also killed during the invasion. (An additional 2,000 died fighting Polish troops as members of ethnic German militia forces such as the Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz, which constituted a fifth column during the invasion.)

The country was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. Slovakia gained back those territories taken by Poland in autumn 1938. Lithuania received the city of Vilnius and its environs on 28 October 1939 from the Soviet Union. On 8 and 13 September 1939, the German military districts of "Posen" (Poznan)—commanded by General Alfred von Vollard-Bockelberg [de]—and "Westpreußen" (West Prussia)—commanded by General Walter Heitz—were established in conquered Greater Poland and Pomerelia, respectively. Based on laws of 21 May 1935 and 1 June 1938, the German Wehrmacht delegated civil administrative powers to "Chiefs of Civil Administration" (Chefs der Zivilverwaltung, CdZ). German dictator Adolf Hitler appointed Arthur Greiser to become the CdZ of the Posen military district, and Danzig's Gauleiter Albert Forster to become the CdZ of the West Prussian military district. On 3 October, the military districts Lodz and Krakau (Kraków) were set up under command of Generalobersten (Colonel-Generals) Gerd von Rundstedt and Wilhelm List, and Hitler appointed Hans Frank and Arthur Seyss-Inquart as civil heads, respectively.At the same time, Frank was appointed "supreme chief administrator" for all occupied territories.On 28 September, another secret German–Soviet protocol modified the arrangements of August: all of Lithuania was shifted to the Soviet sphere of influence; in exchange, the dividing line in Poland was moved in Germany's favour, eastwards towards the Bug River. On 8 October, Germany formally annexed the western parts of Poland with Greiser and Forster as Reichsstatthalter, while the south-central parts were administered as the General Government led by Frank.